DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 211 731 CE 031 006

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TITLE Special Needs Populations in Vocational Education.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, D.C. Educational Policy and Organization Program.
PUB DATE [Jul 81]
NOTE 120p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; Agency Role; Data Collection; Definitions; *Disabilities; *Disadvantaged; Economically Disadvantaged; Educational Finance; Educational Legislation; Educationally Disadvantaged; Educational Policy; *Federal Legislation; Financial Support; Individual Needs; Objectives; Program Development; *Program Implementation; School Districts; State Agencies; Student Evaluation; Student Needs; Student Placement; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Limited English Speaking; Special Needs Students; *Vocational Education Amendments 1976; Vocational Education Study

ABSTRACT

This report on the impact of the Vocational Education ACT (VEA) on special needs populations in vocational education examines the structure of the VEA, the state and local contexts in which the law is implemented, and the problems of serving special populations that the mechanisms are attempting to address. Outlined first are the goals and role of the VEA as they pertain to special needs populations. Various aspects of state behavior and implementation of the VEA are discussed, including funds administration, reporting on use of funds and on coordination with other laws, evaluating the results of additional services, other state agency activities, and policy implications. Covered next are the following aspects of local implementation of the VEA definition, identification and placement of handicapped, disadvantaged, and limited English proficient students; strategies for serving each of these special needs populations; planning and reporting activities; and policy implications. Reasons behind the limited impact of the VEA are discussed, including the multiple goals and administrating agencies of the VEA, differences between state and local contexts in which the law is implemented, and problems in serving special needs populations. Also included in the report are recommendations pertaining to possible structural changes in the VEA. (MN)

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ED211731

SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATIONS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

By

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
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CE031006

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SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATIONS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

In passing the 1976 Amendments to the Vocational Education Act, Congress reaffirmed its commitment to providing equal access to educational opportunities by targeting a variety of provisions to individuals with special needs in vocational education. The Congress identified several groups for special attention: the handicapped, the academically and economically disadvantaged, the limited-English proficient, Native Americans and women. These are groups whom Congress felt were not being well served in vocational education as indicated by their under-representation overall in vocational education or their concentration in a narrow range of often low paying, low status occupational areas. With the exception of women, these groups are defined as having special needs which prevent them from succeeding in regular programs of vocational education. For these groups, providing equal access involves not only open enrollment practices which allow them to enter whichever programs of vocational education they desire but also the provision of special services which enable them to succeed in those programs.*

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* With women, equal access tends to be more a question of gaining entrance to a program, though ongoing support activities for women in occupational areas traditionally dominated by men are also important.

This paper will only examine the provisions of VEA dealing with handicapped students and disadvantaged students including the limited English proficient. Women and Native Americans are not included because they are to be given special attention through different mechanisms than those used for the handicapped and disadvantaged. The needs of women, or more precisely the goal of eliminating sex bias and sex stereotyping which affects both men and women, are addressed primarily through the requirements that each state agency hire full time personnel and that each state fulfill ten functions specified in the law and regulations. The needs of Native Americans are addressed primarily through grants from the Commissioner directly to tribal organizations under Part A of VEA. Because of these differences in the mechanisms specified in the law, these groups deserve separate treatment. Provisions for bilingual vocational education under Part A are also not dealt with in this paper.

Despite this emphasis on special needs populations, it appears that the Vocational Education Act (VEA) as implemented by state and local educational agencies has had only a limited impact on improving access to vocational education for these populations. While many special needs students are being served in vocational programs, the extent and quality of services provided varies among schools. Also, the efforts being made for special needs students in many cases can be attributed to other state or federal laws, such as P.L. 94-142, or to local initiatives.

In analyzing the reasons for this limited impact, we begin from the premise that the effectiveness of a law depends in large measure on the fit between the strategies employed, the problem being addressed and the context in which the law is to be implemented. Limited impact, then, often does not result simply from inadequate enforcement of the law but from either strategies which are not appropriate or fully effective to the problem or setting, or from characteristics of the problem or setting which limit any intervention. Thus, in order to understand the operation and effectiveness of the VEA mechanisms for improving access for special needs populations one must consider:

- the structure of the Vocational Education Act;
- the state and local context in which the law is implemented; and
- the problems of serving special populations which the mechanisms are attempting to address.

The structure of the VEA affects the implementation of the special needs population provisions in two ways. First, the law is organized around grants to the state vocational education agencies rather than grants directly to the local agencies which provide vocational education. Consequently, the state agency exercises considerable influence over the

federal message which is communicated to the local agencies -- the accuracy of the message and the prominence it is given. In part the influence stems from the discretion which the state agency is allowed in carrying out many provisions of the law -- for example, the types of activities which VEA funds can support. The influence also stems from the interpretation the state gives to provisions over which it has no discretion but is simply required to communicate to local agencies receiving VEA funds. The implementation of any law among levels of government requires interpretation at each level. While a clearly written, closely specified law provides less opportunity for interpretation than an ambiguous one, some interpretation still occurs. The direction of the interpretation -- either in supporting or diluting federal intent -- is determined by the understanding of the law's intent and provisions, and by the congruence between federal intent and the priorities and values of the individuals and organizations implementing the law.

Second, the goal of providing equal access to special needs populations is only one of several Congressional goals in the VEA. Congress is also concerned with improving the quality of vocational education programs and their responsiveness to labor market needs, with special emphasis on the development of new programs and on the coordination of resources among agencies providing vocational education and employment training programs. To support these goals, Congress mandates, among other things, that VEA funds be used for program support and improvement activities and it includes provisions for processes of planning, evaluation and data reporting. One effect of these multiple goals is to dilute the attention given to

any one goal -- or to allow states to set their own priorities among goals. Another effect reported by many vocational educators is the perception that attention to special needs populations is actually in conflict with the goal of maintaining up to date high quality programs which place a high proportion of their students in occupations related to their training. It is also felt to be in conflict with evaluation standards which define success in terms of placement rates.

Third, the structure of VEA with its multiple purposes results in assistance provided under the Act being used to support a variety of activities which vary considerably among states and local institutions within states. In addition, the multiple purposes together with modest levels of funding provided under VEA mean that VEA funds usually fund selected activities or resources within vocational programs rather than supporting complete programs or even projects. As a result, VEA supported projects do not have a clear identity which is constant across local agencies and frequently are not visible within individual institutions. Local staff and parents cannot point to a VEA program as they can a Title I or Follow Through program. While the varied and partially funded VEA activities are consistent with the Congressional view of the federal role in vocational education as a catalyst for state and local efforts, they also have two implications for the implementation and impact of the law: First, implementation is more difficult to control from the state (and therefore the federal) level. Second, the lack of visibility of VEA activities in itself diminishes the impact of the law in that even when the law does effect changes, the changes are often not attributed to VEA.

The second set of factors which affect the implementation of the VEA and its impact on special needs populations is the state and local context in which the law is implemented. The state vocational education agencies and the local education institutions were not organized solely to implement federal law. Both sets of agencies are independent organizations with goals beyond VEA and with their own constituencies, political pressures and constraints, and priorities. To the extent that these local factors compete with rather than support federal intent, they may limit the impact of VEA. Also, the expertise and resources available to state and local agencies affect the impact of the federal law. Even if an agency agrees with federal goals, it may lack the funds and staff knowledge to carry them out. Conversely, if a state agency, for example, has the resources to hire staff to concentrate on special needs populations, it is more likely to implement the law better.

Of particular importance in examining the VEA in context is the recognition that at the local level, federal funds represent only a small proportion of the total funds spent on vocational education, and as we said above, VEA programs are not visible as distinct programs. Moreover, vocational education is often only one curriculum among many in a local education agency. As a result, the VEA and the goal within it of serving special populations will often not be given high priority.

The implementation and impact of the special needs population's provisions of VEA are influenced, third, by the nature of the problem being addressed. By definition, special needs individuals need additional

assistance in order to succeed in programs of vocational education. The problems which some special needs individuals face are very difficult to overcome. Even moderate problems are sometimes hard to deal with because many vocational educators are reluctant to work with these students since they are not properly trained and reportedly fear the students will be hurt. They are also concerned that the extra attention given to special needs students will detract from the time and resources they can devote to their regular students.

The definitions of special populations also affect the impact of the VEA mechanisms. Special needs students in the VEA are defined in groups. They are also often provided services in these groups. In fact, however, the groups defined in the law include individuals with widely differing needs and interests. To meet these needs and interests fully, local agencies should ideally tailor a program of activities and support services to each individual in the vocational program of his or her choice. Since this approach can be extremely expensive, schools fall back on the group approach and special needs students are not provided with unlimited access to programs of vocational education that Congress perhaps envisioned.

Given these factors which influence the impact and implementation of the VEA provisions governing special populations, the questions to answered in reauthorizing the Act are: Should the federal government promote equal access to educational opportunity in vocational education

for individuals with special needs? If so, how can it do so most effectively? Or more specifically, what policy and goals should Congress pursue; and what specifically, what policy and goals should Congress pursue; and what instruments or mechanisms will be most effective in furthering federal intent while building on a realistic view of the context in which the law is to be implemented and the nature of the problem being addressed? To assist in addressing this question, this paper will examine the implementation of the current VEA provisions, their effectiveness in achieving Congressional goals and the factors which affect the implementation and impact.* The paper will begin by reviewing the legislation and regulations to highlight provisions concerned with special needs populations. Then it will look at state level implementation of the law and, more generally, at state activities for special needs populations. Finally, it will examine local implementation and activities for special needs populations. At the state level all special populations will be discussed together for the most part since the administration of the law tends to be similar for the different groups. At the local level the handicapped, academically and economically disadvantaged, and limited English speaking will more frequently be discussed separately because they differ in the problems they face and in the strategies which are used to serve them.

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* The data reported in this paper are drawn primarily from two studies commissioned by the NIE Vocational Education Study: "Implementation of the Education Amendments of 1976: A Study of State and Local Compliance and Evaluation Practices in Vocational Educaion" prepared by Abt Associates Inc. and "Vocational Education: Meeting the Needs of Special Populations" prepared by A.L. Nellum and Associates.

FEDERAL PURPOSE AND ROLE

The goal of promoting equal access to educational opportunity to students with special needs is commonly viewed as one of the major themes of the 1976 Education Amendments as they pertain to vocational education. This goal, however, is not specified as one of the four areas highlighted in the statement of purpose to the Vocational Education Act as revised in 1976. The primary purpose of Part A of the Act, which governs grants to the states, is to assist the states in improving planning in the use of all resources available for vocational education and manpower training. The other purposes include authorizing grants to the states to assist them:

- to extend, improve and where necessary, maintain existing programs of vocational education;
- to develop new programs of vocational education;
- to develop and carry out programs to overcome sex discrimination and sex stereotyping in vocational education;
- to provide part time employment for youths who need earnings to continue their vocational training on a full time basis.

Students with special needs are mentioned only in the clause modifying these four purposes:

> "so that persons of all ages in all communities of the state, . . . [including] those with special educational handicaps, . . . will have ready access to vocational training or retraining which is of high quality, which is realistic in the light of actual or anticipated opportunities for gainful employment, and which is suited to their needs, interests, and ability to benefit from such training." (Section 101)

The Congressional intent regarding special needs populations can also be inferred from the multiple provisions directed at these populations throughout the legislation. These provisions, first, define the special needs populations to be

served. Handicapped and disadvantaged students are defined operationally in the regulations which implement the law as shown in Figure 1. The definition of handicapped is taken directly from the definition used in the Education of the Handicapped Act as mandated in the law. The definition of disadvantaged given in the law distinguishes between economic and academic disadvantage, and provides for special services to both groups. The regulations extend the Amendments, as directed by Congress, to specify operational criteria of academic and economic disadvantage. An additional criterion of both the handicapped and disadvantaged definitions is that persons cannot succeed in a regular vocational education program without special services, activities, or programs. Limited English-speaking ability is also defined in the regulations although not in the same level of operational detail.

The provisions also target funds to special needs populations. These provisions are the most prominent mechanisms for furthering Congressional intent in this area. Two mechanisms are used. First, funds are earmarked for special needs populations: states are required under Subparts 2 and 3 to set aside at least 20% of their basic alloeation for services for disadvantaged students and 10% for services for handicapped students; the Act also maintains a separate allocation under Subpart 4 for special programs for the disadvantaged in areas of high youth unemployment and high school dropouts. Second, states are required to give priority to eligible recipients in economically needy areas in distributing funds under all subparts.

The set-aside provisions require for the first time in the 1976

FIGURE I

DEFINITIONS OF SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATIONS

Target Group	Regulation	Definition
Disadvantaged	104.804	(a) The term disadvantaged means persons (other than handicapped persons) who: (1) Have academic or economic disadvantages; and (2) Require special services, assistance, or programs in order to enable them to succeed in vocational education programs. (b) Academic disadvantage, for the purposes of this definition of disadvantaged, means that a person: (1) Lacks reading and writing skills; (2) Lacks mathematical skills; or (3) Performs below grade level. (c) Economic disadvantage, for the purposes of this definition of disadvantaged, means: (1) Family income is at or below national poverty level; (2) Participant or parent(s) or guardian of the participant is unemployed; (3) Participant or parent of participant is recipient of public assistance; or (4) Participant is institutionalized or under state guardianship. (d) Eligibility for participation in the special program supported under [104.801 is limited to persons who (because of academic or economic disadvantage): (1) Do not have, at the time of entrance into a vocational education program, the prerequisites for success in the program; or who (2) Are enrolled in a vocational education program but require supportive services or special programs to enable them to meet the requirements for the program that are established by the state or the local educational agency.

FIGURE I

(cont'd.)

Target Group	Regulation	Definition
Limited English-speaking	Appendix A Definitions	Limited English-speaking ability when used in reference to an individual means: (a) Individuals who were not born in the United States or whose native tongue is a language other than English, and (b) Individuals who came from environments where a language other than English is dominant, and by reasons thereof, have difficulties speaking and understanding instruction in English.
Handicapped	Appendix A Definitions (Education of Handicapped Act)	Handicapped means: (a) A person who is: (1) Mentally retarded; (2) Hard of hearing; (3) Deaf; (4) Speech impaired; (5) Visually handicapped; (6) Seriously emotionally disturbed; (7) Orthopedically impaired; or (8) Other health-impaired person, or persons with specific learning disabilities; and (b) Who, by reason of the above: (1) Requires special education and related services, and (2) Cannot succeed in the regular vocational education program without special educational assistance; or (3) Requires a modified vocational education program.

Amendments that states spend a certain portion of the disadvantaged set-aside on students with limited proficiency in English; the portion is to be equivalent to the proportion of limited English-proficient persons age 15 to 24 in relation to the entire population of the state in the same age bracket.

The 1976 Amendments also add a provision for categorical matching for the set-asides in order "to assure that Congressional intent in giving special status to these areas is upheld." (Senate report, p. 78) In earmarking funds for special needs populations, Congress defines its role as a catalyst to state and local efforts. Congress does not want efforts to provide services to special needs populations to rely entirely on federal dollars or to be limited to activities supported by federal assistance. Instead the federal dollars are intented to drive state and local dollars; to serve as an incentive to state and local expenditures in this area. Thus, every dollar of federal set-aside funds spent must be matched with a dollar of state and local funds which are spent on services for handicapped and disadvantaged students in vocational education.

The regulations which implement the 1976 Amendments further emphasize the federal desire to increase state and local efforts for the handicapped and disadvantaged students and ensure that federal dollars are supplementing rather than supplanting state and local dollars by specifying that federal set-aside funds can only be applied toward the excess costs of providing additional services; i.e., "costs of special educational and related services above the costs for non-handicapped and non-disadvantaged student" (Regulation 104.303). Interestingly, the excess cost provisions apply only when handicapped and disadvantaged students are

enrolled in regular programs of vocational education. Despite language in both the law and the regulations which encourages mainstreaming (Section 110(a); Regulations 104.312 and 104.313), separate specialized programs for handicapped and disadvantaged students can use federal funds to pay half the costs of the full program rather than just the excess costs.*

In contrast to the matching and excess cost requirements for the set-asides, federal funds under Subpart 4 can be used to pay the full cost of vocational programs for the disadvantaged.

Under the second targeting mechanism, the law requires that states give priority in distributing funds to applicants located in economically depressed areas and areas of high unemployment, and unable to provide the resources necessary to meet the vocational education needs of those areas without federal assistance (Section 106(a)). Moreover, in determining the amount of funding to be given to each of the approved applicants, the state must use as the two most important factors, in the case of local education agencies:

- the relative financial ability of the agency to provide the the resources necessary to meet the vocational education needs in its area; and
- the relative number or concentration of low-income families or individuals in the area.

Subpart 4 funds are also to be targeted to areas of high youth unemployment and high school dropouts. Finally, the provisions of Subpart 5, Consumer and Homemaking, require that states use at least one third of

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* Office of Education Notice of Interpretation, Federal Register, March 27, 1978.

these monies to pay up to 90% of the costs of programs in economically depressed areas or areas with high rates of unemployment (Regulation 104.906).

A third set of mechanisms intended to further the goal of providing equal access to special needs populations is requirements for planning, evaluation and accountability. Throughout the Act, there is heavy emphasis on a model of rational planning to improve the quality and relevance of vocational education. This emphasis touches special needs populations in several ways. The five-year state plan is to describe precisely the intended uses of federal funds and allocation of state and local funds to serve handicapped, disadvantaged and limited-English speaking persons (Regulation 104.186). The annual plan and accountability report are then to describe how funds used will comply or have complied with the uses set forth in the five-year plan (Regulations 104.222 and 104.241). The five-year state plan is also to describe the procedures to be used to assure compliance with the general application provisions for giving priority to economically despressed areas and using funds consistently with the standards of the Education of the Handicapped Act (Regulation 104.182). And the five-year plan and annual plan are to describe the mechanisms to be used to coordinate vocational education programs assisted under VEA and manpower training programs under CETA (Regulations 104.188 and 104.222).

The regulations, although not the Act itself, specify that the state board of vocational education must evaluate the effectiveness of each formally organized vocational program or project in terms of the results

of additional services to handicapped, disadvantaged and limited English proficient persons (as well as women and members of minority groups). The results are to be measured according to criteria established under other evaluation categories: planning and operational processes, results of student achievement and results of student employment success (Regulation 104.402).

A final set of mechanisms intended to improve access for special needs populations is policies for service delivery. As mentioned earlier, the regulations define who is to be considered handicapped, disadvantaged or limited-English speaking for purposes of this Act. In addition, the law and regulations stipulate that federal funds for special needs populations should be used to "the maximum extent possible" to assist handicapped, disadvantaged and limited-English proficient persons to participate in regular vocational educational programs (Regulations 104.312 and 104.313). Also, services for handicapped students are to meet the standards of Part B of Education of the Handicapped Act (Regulation 104.5). Beyond these provisions, the VEA sets no policies for actual service delivery to special needs populations.

The emphasis in the Vocational Education Act on providing access to individuals with special needs is not new with the 1976 Education Amendments. The emphasis in federal legislation on serving special needs students in vocational education began in 1963. The Vocational Education Act of 1963 included for the first time the mandate that vocational education respond to the special needs of students who have academic, socio-economic or other handicaps which prevent them from succeeding in a regular

program of vocational education.

The original mandate for special needs populations was very broad. The provisions in 1963 focused on equality of access to vocational programs; the Act allowed states to use a portion of their basic grants to serve these disadvantaged students but did not require them to target funds. In 1968, Congress determined that this broad emphasis had not resulted in services that met the needs of disadvantaged populations. Testimony before the Congressional committee from the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education and various sections of the educational community pointed out that simply emphasizing services to special needs students did not ensure that money was being spent to remedy these concerns. Congress amended the 1963 Act to specify that 15 percent of the basic state grant must be set aside to pay for up to half the cost of programs for disadvantaged students and 10 percent for the handicapped. The 1968 Amendments also authorized a new 100 percent-funded federal program for the disadvantaged under Section 102(b).

Despite the added specificity of the 1968 Amendments, criticisms of vocational education's response to the needs of handicapped and disadvantaged students continued. The major criticism voiced in the Congressional hearings which preceded the drafting of the 1976 Education Amendments was that vocational education expenditures for these special needs populations had declined since FY 1970. The basis for this criticism was an analysis of handicapped and disadvantaged expenditures in the 1974 GAO report* which showed a decrease in the state and local match for federal set-aside dollars;

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* Comptroller General of the United States, Report to the Congress, "What is the Role of Federal Assistance for Vocational Education?" (Washington, D.C.: December 31, 1974).

in FY 1973, 23 states spent fewer state and local dollars for every federal dollar for the disadvantaged than they had in FY 1970; for the handicapped in 19 states (p.4). This pattern was interpreted as evidence of declining support for these populations. The GAO report also criticized vocational education more generally for the inadequacy of the resources devoted to special populations, making broad reference to large unmet needs, relatively few handicapped participants and inadequate dollars, personnel and facilities (pp. 22-23).

STATE BEHAVIOR AND IMPLEMENTATION

State vocational education agencies play a key role in the implementation of the Vocational Education Act because all provisions under Part A of the Act are administered by the states. Many of the requirements of the law are specifically directed at the state level -- for example, those for funds distribution, planning and evaluation. In such areas, state agencies have considerable discretion over the administration of the law. Even the federal requirements which apply to local activities and responsibilities are transmitted through the state agency, not directly from the federal to the local level. Thus, the state agency controls the communication of the federal law and the intent behind it to the local agencies.

In this role, the state agency can either support or dilute federal intent. This support or dilution can occur, first, through the decisions made by the state agency -- i.e., in the way it carries out its discretionary authority (e.g. ?). It can occur, second, through the level of accuracy with which federal requirements are stated to local agencies and the priority which the requirements are given.

Accuracy is in large measure a function of the state's understanding of federal requirements, rather than of deliberate misstatement. With ambigious sections of the law, particularly, the state agency may misinterpret the federal requirements. With audit disallowances being a pervasive concern, these misinterpretations frequently err toward a conservative interpretation of the letter of the law but may consequently deviate from intent -- e.g., as with excess costs which will be discussed below. Also, state agencies sometimes communicate their discretionary

decisions as direct federal requirements, or perhaps more precisely, fail to distinguish between the two. For example, they may restrict the use of the set asides to a narrow set of purposes -- as they have a right to do -- without explaining that the federal law provides more leeway.

The priority given to federal goals and requirements is a function of three factors. First, the priority given depends on the state agency's view of federal authority: some state agencies have a cavalier attitude toward federal requirements and appear to give serious attention only to those with which they agree; other state agencies seem almost intimidated by federal requirements and go to great lengths to avoid being found out of compliance. Second, and closely related to the first factor, the priority given federal requirements depends on the congruence between those requirementsand the priorities set by the state agency in response to its own goals and political pressures. If, for example, a state has a major thrust toward economic development it may not give much attention to special needs populations. Third, the priority given depends on the resources available -- both funds and expertise -- to implement the law. For example, a state agency may agree with the goal of serving special needs populations in vocational education and decide that local agencies need technical assistance in order to address the problems of these groups, but the state agency may lack the staff needed to provide that assistance.

Not only does the state agency control the content of the federal message which is transmitted to local agencies, it also controls to a great extent the visibility of the VEA at the local level. The state vocational education agency is responsible for state laws and policies governing

vocational education as well as for the VEA. Often the state agency issues policies and directives -- and sometimes distributes funds -- without distinguishing the source. This means often that local agencies do not know which requirements originate with state and which with the VEA.

At the same time the state agency plays a key role in interpreting and communicating federal law to local agencies, it generally exercises limited control over local actions in vocational education. Education officials in most states place a strong emphasis on local autonomy: it is jealously guarded by local educators and usually respected by state administrators. The emphasis on local autonomy is particularly strong in relation to federal assistance to vocational education since the proportion of federal dollars to state and local dollars supporting vocational education is extremely small. Because of the prominence of local autonomy, state vocational education agencies do not have complete control, or even necessarily direct authority, over local program offerings and policies. The state agency may dictate the categories of programs and activities for which federal -- and state -- funds can be used but they usually leave the design and content of programs to the local institutions. The state agency may also require local agencies to file applications and plans, to submit to program evaluations and to supply data on expenditures, students and staff in order to receive federal and state funds. But it has no stronger sanctions for non-compliance than withholding program approval or state and federal funding. Not only are most state agencies reluctant to use these sanctions but even if they do, the local agencies can still offer the program or activity in question with all local funds.

It is within this context of a dual state role -- the key to the implementation of federal law but with limited authority over local actions -- that the state responsibilities for implementing the 1976 Amendments must be considered. An understanding of this context is necessary to understanding of the ways in which state agencies carry out their functions and, equally important, to making recommendations to change the law to better fit the realities of this context.

The 1976 Amendments mandate state agency functions related to special populations in three areas:

- administration of federal funds;
- reports on uses of funds and coordinations with other laws and agencies delivering services to special needs populations; and
- evaluation of results of additional services.

In this section, we will look at how states are carrying out these mandates and try to determine whether the mandates as implemented are furthering the federal goal of promoting access to equal educational opportunity. We will also look at other state agency activities which are not required by the VEA but which fit with the state role and appear to increase the effectiveness of the state in supporting federal intent.

Funds Administration

Probably the most prominent function performed by state vocational education agencies in relation to special needs populations is the administration of VEA funds. The pertinent provisions of the law in this area are those which:

- earmark funds for the national priority programs through the

handicapped and disadvantaged set asides and for special programs for the disadvantaged under Subpart 4; and

- give priority for funding to applications from needy districts.

With both sets of provisions, the state agency is allowed considerable discretion in administering the law.

Set asides and Subpart 4. The 1976 Amendments essentially set two firm requirements for the use of the set asides and Subpart 4: 1) the amount of money to be expended -- 10% of the basic allocation for the handicapped, 20% of the basic allocation for the disadvantaged and a separate allocation for Subpart 4 -- and 2) the provision that the set asides be matched dollar for dollar with state and local monies being spent on handicapped and disadvantaged students. The regulations add the requirement that the set aside funds be applied only to the excess costs of providing vocational education to special needs students -- i.e., the costs above the average cost of providing vocational education to non-handicapped and non-disadvantaged students.*

Beyond these requirements the states have broad latitude in deciding how the funds are to be used. The law to some extent and regulations in greater detail specify eligibility criteria for receiving additional services under the set asides and Subpart 4. They also set a policy that students with special needs are to be served whenever possible in regular rather than separate programs of vocational education. But, in both of

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* The excess cost requirement applies only when the handicapped or disadvantaged student is mainstreamed in a regular vocation class; when handicapped or disadvantaged students are placed in a separate program, the set asides can be applied against the full costs of the program.

these areas, the provisions are broad enough that they do not appear to restrict the expenditure of funds. Also, the set asides and Subpart 4 funds can be used to support a wide range of activities and services.

The analysis of the set-asides and subpart 4 provisions, then, will be less concerned with issues of compliance than with states difficulties in administering the law and with the realization of federal intent. The central compliance questions here are whether appropriate activities are being counted for the categorical match and, more important, whether the excess costs are allowable. Those are questions for auditors and will not be addressed in this paper.

The first question to be answered in examining the implementation of the set-aside and Subpart 4 requirements is: are the funds being spent? Congress, in drafting the 1976 Amendments, was concerned about what it judged to be inadequate levels of spending for special needs populations in vocational education. The basis for this judgment was the 1974 GAO report which found that the federal handicapped and disadvantaged funds were being matched with state and local dollars at a much lower rate than vocational education funds overall. For FY 1973, the GAO report states:

> . . . The nationwide ratio of state and local funding to Federal funding for all part B programs . . . was $5.93 to $1.00. Yet the ratio for programs serving the disadvantaged was only $2.19 to $1.00 and for the handicapped only $1.10 to $1.00. (p. 4)

From these figures, GAO concluded that "persons with special needs have not been given as high a priority with state and local support as with Federal support." (p. 4) Moreover, the GAO report found that in many states, the state and local contribution declined between 1970 and 1973.

A secondary analysis,conducted by Abt Associates, of BOAE statistics

on the state and local match for federal VEA funding for FY 1978, shows that although the level of matching for handicapped and disadvantaged funds is still lower than the match for all VEA funds, it has increased since FY 1973. Nationwide, the ratio of state and local funds to federal VEA funds is $12.27 to $1.00, while the state/local to federal ratio for the disadvantaged set-aside is $5.34 to $1.00, and for the handicapped set-aside is $4.07 to $1.00. Also, vocational education administrators indicate that the expenditures they report to BOAE to satisfy the federal matching requirements by no means reflect all of the state and local spending for handicapped and disadvantaged students in vocational education.

Another major Congressional concern is that handicapped and disadvantaged funds will be returned to the federal Treasury unspent. The Abt study shows that in FY 1978, none of the 15 sample states in fact spent all of its set-asides and Subpart 4 money during that fiscal year. However, given that states legally can, and routinely do, spend one year's federal allocation over a period of several years, this finding alone does not indicate that Congressional fears of unspent funds have been realized. That question cannot be finally resolved until all expenditures are reported several years hence. One intermediate indication of special problems in spending the set-asides can be drawn from the proportion of the handicapped and disadvantaged funds spent in relation to the total proportion of the VEA grant spent: one could argue that the carryovers in the set-asides are an indication of low priority only if they are appreciably larger than the carryover for all VEA monies. Abt shows that in 6 of its 15 sample states for the disadvantaged set-aside and in 9 of the 15 states for the handicapped set-aside, the carryover for the

set-asides was no greater than the carry over for the VEA grant overall. This suggests that in these states the proportion of funds not spent reflects general administrative practices rather than problems unique to serving handicapped and disadvantaged students. In the remaining states, however, the carryover for the set-asides was larger than that for the total VEA grant, indicating that there may be special problems in spending these funds in these states.

Surprisingly, the Abt analysis shows that the proportion of Subpart 4 funds expended exceeds the proportion of the total VEA funds spent in only five states. Because Subpart 4 does not require a state and local match, one might expect that it would be easier to spend than the set-asides -- or the total VEA grant -- and consequently would consistently show a higher proportion of the allocation spent.

While Congress focuses on levels of spending as evidence of the adequacy (or inadequacy) of the resources that states are devoting to special needs populations, state and local administrators emphasize the difficulties entailed in spending the special populations monies. One general complaint among vocational education administrators is that the set-asides for the handicapped and disadvantaged together with the set-aside for postsecondary and adult programs, the mandatory 80/20 split between vocational programs and program improvement and other earmarking of funds tie up such a great proportion of money to use as they see fit to meet their priorities. The major complaint, however, is that the excess cost and matching requirements are so restrictive that they serve as disincentives rather than incentives in using the set-asides.

Many of the state and local administrators argue that the matching

requirements are unfair and almost impossible to meet. One state director has stated that the regulations now require "at least a 50 to 1 match" on the total cost of providing vocational education for special needs vocational students. He further pointed out that vocational education is already considered by many local boards to be too costly. With the recent proliferation of state and local tax-cutting incentives, school boards are not receptive to proposals for additional spending. Another state director indicated that the matching provisions keep the states from giving the funds to those districts "most in need of additional support." These are local districts which were unable or unwilling to provide the required match and the state was unable to find additional funds to assist with the match. In another state, vocational education administrators reported that $300,000 of the set-aside was returned at the end of FY 1978 because local agencies were unable to generate the required match. In these latter examples, the state agencies were passing the burden for generating a match to the local districts even though the 1976 Amendments explicitly state that no individual district should not be prevented from serving the special needs populations by its inability to provide the required match. The provision for a statewide rather than a program match, however, assumes that in some districts or in state programs, there is a sufficient over-match to average out at the right level. One state director estimated that if the state were to supply the matching funds for these programs, it would take an additional annual appropriation of $60 million, and that was unlikely.

Some states, however, have been successful in generating a state match without burdening the local districts. A few states have state-

funded vocational programs which they use as a match. Several states give part of their set-aside allocations to special state-supported schools for the deaf, blind, or mentally retarded. These states also fund vocational programs for inmates in state prisons. Obviously, it is easy to generate a very large over-match in these types of institutions with a small amount of federal VEA funds. One state was able to generate almost all of its required state and local match by allocating funds for a state-supported inmate training program.

In 1979, Congress responded to the states' concerns regarding the stringent matching requirements with the passage of Technical Amendments. As explained in the House report accompanying the Technical Amendments, Congress recognized that the requirements were serving as a disincentive to providing federal dollars to support vocational education to special populations and were imposing a financial hardship on local eligible recipients (p. 10). To remedy this problem, the Amendments allow states to exceed on a statewide basis the 50 percent match to the federal share for programs and services for thehandicapped and disadvantaged, "pursuant to regulations issued by the Commissioner" (p. 10). The regulations which implement these Amendments allow states to fund additional services using up to 60 percent federal funds with several restrictions. Among these restrictions, states have to apply to the Commissioner each time they want to utilize this waiver; the application must be filed in the fiscal year preceding the year in which the state wants to use a greater federal share; and the portion of the federal share exceeding 50 percent must be taken from the regular Subpart 2 and 3 funding, not from the set-asides. While it is too soon to assess the impact of these Amendments and regulations, it appears that the procedures for applying for a waiver may place such a burden on the states

that they may not feel it worthwhile to seek to take advantage of the more flexible law. Clearly this is an issue that Congress will want to continue to monitor.

The second major problem cited by vocational education administrators in explaining their difficulties in spending the set-asides has to do with the definition of excess costs and the problems of creating an adequate audit trail for them: state and local agencies have been cautious in their interpretation of the excess cost regulation because they fear that their claims for federal reimbursement will be disallowed; as a result, some local agencies apparently do not claim reimbursement for expenses that presumable qualify.

In part, the difficulties stem from a poor understanding of the definition of additional services and excess costs. In one state, state administrators reported that "three different federal officials gave us three different" explanations of excess cost. Most often, however, state officials contended that the lack of the operational examples of allowable excess costs expenditures (particularly for the disadvantaged population) had inhibited many local agencies who preferred to give the money back to the state rather than take a chance on being accused of misspending the funds, as had happened in one or two states. Few local education agencies, according to state staffs, seem willing to run the risk of having to pay back monies from regular revenues. Thus, in the absence of clear definitions and approved procedures, many local agencies prefer not to use the handicapped and disadvantaged set-asides. Other agencies do use the money but limit themselves to safe, and therefore often uncreative, uses of the funds which may not best serve the students to whom they are directed.

To some extent at least, these definitional difficulties may be a function of lack of experience in working with this concept and, therefore, should diminish as time goes on, particularly if OVAE and the state agencies provide technical assistance. At least a few states are holding workshops and issuing guidelines on these topics with the explicit goal of encouraging and enabling local education agencies to increase their use of set-aside funds.

The difficulties associated with the excess costs requirements also stem from the accounting systems required to document them. This problem may be harder to solve than the definitional problem. Several respondents indicated that it is extremely difficult to track expenditures for additional services. The problem is particularly difficult to track expenditures for additional services. The problem is particularly difficult when the special needs students are mainstreamed and expenditures must be tracked for each student individually. The difficulty, according to state administrators, is not that tracking cannot be done, but that it is not cost effective to claim a federal reimbursement when new accounting procedures must be developed in order to provide evidence to substantiate the expenditure. The director of vocational education in a large city stated that his system serves several thousand handicapped and disadvantaged students in the city's five high schools and one vocational center each year. However, they had not claimed a single handicapped or disadvantaged student for VEA reimbursement purposes because the computer was not capable of handling the required additional data elements, and a new computer was "out of the question."

The response of turning back or not claiming set-aside funds is particularly attractive when other sources of federal or state funds are

available to serve the same students with fewer strings attached or at a higher rate of reimbursement. For example, a number of local administrators stated that they would rather obtain federal assistance to serve disadvantaged students under CETA than under the Vocational Education Act because they received considerably more money.

Thus, many of state and local administrators feel that the excess cost and matching requirements create substantial problems in spending the set-asides. Some sample states surmount these problems, at least to the extent that they spend the set-asides, while others do not. It is not possible to determine the extent to which some of the difficulties cited by the administrators -- i.e., that the match is not available and excess costs cannot be documented without incurring a tremendous burden in record keeping -- are inherent to the requirements and therefore lasting, as opposed to being functions of lack of experience in dealing with these concepts and therefore to be expected to diminish over time. In either case, the provisions in the short run are creating a disincentive to spending federal funds. In some states there may be a trade-off between using federal funds and promoting the use of state and local funds for special needs populations. One state consultant for special programs reported that he doubts "that we've gotten any more state and local money into handicapped and disadvantaged programs than we would have without the excess cost/matching provision. We would definitely have gotten more federal dollars into them without the excess cost/matching, however."

The second question to be answered in examining the implementation of the set-aside and Subpart 4 requirements is: by what means are the funds being given out? Most of the states used to -- and many would prefer to continue -- to distribute these funds by a project method; i.e., local institutions developed proposals for special projects or services they wanted to undertake and requested funds to support the proposals; state agency staff decided which proposals to fund and at what level, often on the basis of past funding levels for that institution and/or professional judgments about the quality of the proposal. Although some states continue to use a project method of funding, BOAE policy encourages a formula method, and some states believe they are required to use it.

State administrators object to the distribution of special population funds by formula on several grounds. First, they argue, the distribution of set-asides by formula results in trivial allocations which are almost useless to the local agency. More frequently, they claim that the formula method sends funds to agencies that do not use the funds and, as a result, the state has large amounts of unspent funds which had to be carried over to the following year.

While there is no evidence available to support or counter the first argument, the second can be addressed by comparing the method by which funds are distributed to the proportion of the grant spent on the set-asides and Subpart 4. If the formula method does in fact result in monies going to agencies that do not spend them, we would expect the proportion of the set-aside and Subpart 4 funds expended in a year to be consistently lower in states which rely entirely on formula distributions than in states

which use the project method or a combination of the two methods. An analysis by Abt Associates to test this assumption in 12 of its 15 sample states shows no clear pattern of superiority of one distribution method over another. Of eight states using the formula distribution methods to distribute the disadvantaged set-aside, five were at or above the median for percentage of total allocation spent during the year, while two of the three states using the project method were in the high range of percent of allocation spent. Of the four states distributing funds with some combination of the two procedures, half were found in the top range and half were in the bottom range of distribution of set-aside funds for the handicapped. A similar analysis of the distribution of funds under Subpart 4 shows that five states distributed funds for these programs using the formula method, while seven and three used the project and combination methods, respectively. Of those states using project method, three were in the high range and four states were in the low range, while two out of five states using the formula method were in the high range. Thus, distributing special populations monies by formula rather than by a project method is not consistently associated with a lower level of spending.

The third question to be answered in examining the implementation of the set-aside and Subpart 4 requirements, though only in the broadest terms,

is: how are these funds being spent? Neither the law nor the regulations places narrow restrictions on the programs, activities or services which can be supported with special needs funds; any of the allowable uses under Subparts 2 and 3 are permitted under the set-asides also, and Subpart 4 has no restrictions at all. As might be expected, given this absence of restrictions, the set-asides and Subpart 4 fund a wide range of activities including special equipment remedial and tutorial services, and in some instances wholly separate programs.

Within this wide range of uses, two points are of note. First, some states place their own restrictions on the use of handicapped and disadvantaged funds. At least one state, for example, only allows these monies to be used for equipment. Such restrictions are usually imposed for two reasons: the allowable uses are chosen to ease the accounting burden in documenting excess costs or, more frequently, the restrictions are consistent with state practices for the use of all VEA funds; many states, for example, do not use VEA funds to pay teacher salaries because local agencies would be hard pressed to cover these costs if federal support were withdrawn. While state agencies may not adopt the practice of limiting uses of the set-aside and Subpart 4 monies with the intention of hindering the goal of serving special needs populations, they may inadvertently have that effect. Finding the appropriate strategy for serving special needs students often requires considerable creativity and leeway. By limiting the alternatives available to local vocational educators, state agencies may be restricting the quality of service these students receive. One local administrator on seeing a copy of Resurge, a BOAE publication which provides

guidelines on services to special needs students, was enthusiastic about the range of activities and services suggested but commented that many were not eligible for federal reimbursement in his state.

A second point to note in considering the uses of the set-asides and Subpart 4 is that some states sponsor a particular approach in serving special needs students. For example, Texas and Oklahoma use the Cooperative Vocational and Academic Education program (CVAE) and Wisconsin and Illinois use the Work Experience and Career Education Program (WECEP). State sponsorship usually involves the issuance of guidelines for program operation and materials and technical assistance to support them. Generally local districts are not required to use these programs but can choose between the state-sponsored program and activities of their own design. Also, the use of state-sponsored programs appears to be declining. The programs are to be noted, however, because they have both good and bad characteristics in terms of furthering federal intent. On the positive side, they are more visible than most VEA activities. They have a name and common identity which is recognized across the state, or in some cases several states, and they are generally regarded as worthwhile programs. Hence, they draw attention in a positive way to serving special needs populations. They also give local administrators a ready-made program with a good chance of success. On the negative side, these programs tend to be separate, specialized programs and thus do not further the federal intent of providing services to special needs students in regular programs of vocational education.

Priority to applications in needy districts. The second mechanism in the 1976 Amendments for targeting funds to special needs populations is to give priority to needydistricts in distributing VEA funds. This mechanism has two parts. First, in deciding which applicants will receive funding, priority is to be given to applicants in economically depressed areas and areas of high unemployment which are unable to meet their vocational education needs without federal assistance. Second, in deciding the amount of funding to be given to each approved applicant, the two most important factors must be the relative financial ability of the applicant and the number or concentration of low-income people in the area. Subparts 4 and 5 also have special requirements for targeting funds to needy districts.

Unfortunately, this is an area where it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether the law is having its intended effect. In part, the difficulty stems from a lack of clear federal guidelines to the states on acceptable funding formulae. The identification of acceptable formulae has been one of the most confusing and unresolved aspects of the 1976 Amendments -- on all dimensions, not just those related to targeting funds to needy districts. As a result of this confusion and changing direction from BOAE, most states have changed their funding formulae at least once.

Although a number of states now have formulae which appear on paper to meet federal requirements, it is still difficult to determine if a high proportion of funds are going to needy districts because of the maze of procedures through which states fund local agencies. However, one type of procedure which may result in distributions which seem counter to federal

intent is the recategorization of VEA funds into special purpose pools. Hypothetically, if a state wishes to give preference in funding to one type of local agency over another, it can do so by making the pool for one type of institution proportionally larger than the pool for another. Hence, while using the same formula to distribute dollars to various institutions throughout the state, the actual result may be that federal dollars are not distributed according to the two most important Congressionally mandated factors at all. The most important element in the allocation pattern may very well be institutional type or some other restrictive pool factor. Thus, in a state where only area centers may qualify for federal support for equipment purchases, it would appear that "relative ability" to pay is narrowly defined to mean "relative ability among like local education agencies." A review of state plans, accountability reports, and interviews with state officials suggests that this hypothetical illustration may well reflect reality. Some states appear to allocate disproportionately more VEA dollars to area vocational centers than to comprehensive high schools offering vocational programs even though the schools are in the same geographic area. At least one state uses 100 percent of the VEA allocation at the postsecondary level, even though there must be some needy secondary schools in the state. The funding pools used in these instances are within the limits of the law but in practice may result in distributions in which factors other than those mandated are in fact most important.

Reporting on Uses of Funds and on Coordination with Other Laws

In keeping with the emphasis throughout the 1976 Amendments on planning and accountability, state agencies are required to address special needs populations in the five-year state plan, the annual plan and the accountability report. More specifically, they are to describe

- the intended and actual uses of the federal funds and accompanying state and local matches for special needs populations;
- the procedures used to give priority to economically depressed areas;
- the procedures for assuring that funds are used consistently with the standards of the Education of the Handicapped Act; and
- the mechanisms to be used to coordinate vocational education programs assisted under VEA and manpower training programs under CETA.

In general, states appear to be complying with these requirements. For example, an analysis of 33 five-year plans (which were submitted before the regulations were issued) shows that:

- 24 of the 33 states describe the use of handicapped and disadvantaged set asides;
- 17 states describe the use of funds for limited-English proficient persons;
- 17 states describe the mechanisms for coordinating each student vocational program with their Individual Educational Plan under P.L. 94-142; and
- 27 states describe mechanisms for coordination between vocational education and CETA.

But despite this moderate compliance with the letter of the law, it is not clear that these requirements have an effect beyond compliance.

In most cases, the descriptions of the mechanisms for coordinating between vocational education and special education and CETA are so general that it is difficult to determine from the reports alone whether they have any impact. More important than reports are the joint activities between state and local vocational educators and CETA and special education staff which will be described in subsequent sections. And for the reasons discussed in the previous section, it is difficult to know what effect the reported procedures to give priority to economically depressed areas have.

The lack of impact of the descriptions of intended and actual uses of funds is apparent from studies of the state planning processes in vocational education. In many state plans, the description of uses of funds is limited to the proposed dollar allocations of the set-asides and Subpart 4 among levels of education and, in some cases, eligible recipients; there is little or no programmatic description of the use of funds. If the Congressional intent in requiring these descriptions of funds allocations is to obtain data as a basis for accountability, then the plans meet federal intent. But if the intent for reporting on the use of handicapped and disadvantaged funds is consistent with the intent for the planning requirements overall -- i.e., that the state plans are to be not simply compliance documents but working documents which summarize state efforts to assess needs and resources and develop a blueprint for action in vocational education -- then the intent is not met. As with planning in other areas, the state agency controls the distribution of federal funds and it can within broad limits specify

allowable uses or occupational areas to be given priority with those funds. It does not, however, prepare a detailed master plan of activities for special populations across the state. Given the emphasis on local autonomy, most local agencies would probably resist such a master plan if the state attempted to impose it.

Evaluation of Results of Additional Services

Program evaluation is another theme which is given emphasis in the 1976 Amendments as a means of improving the quality and relevance of vocational programs. Although the evaluation requirements in the law make no reference to special needs populations in outlining the evaluation responsibilities of state vocational education agencies, the regulations do. As one of four areas of evaluation, the regulations require state agencies (or more accutately, State Boards) to evaluate the results of additional services to special populations in quantitative terms and within the period of the five-year state plan. Among the special populations specifically indentified are handicapped, disadvantaged and limited-English speaking persons. The results of the additional services are to be measured by the evaluation criteria used in the three other areas of evaluation specified in the regulations: planning and operational processes, the results of student achievement and the results of student employment success.

For the most part, states are not meeting these requirements fully. While most states touch on special needs populations in some aspect of their evaluation procedures, the treatment is not always detailed, and, more important, focuses on access to vocational programs rather than the results of additional services.

The primary vehicles for evaluating services to special populations are the program review procedures used by the states to examine planning and operational processes. All sample states in the Abt study which engage in formal review procedures, for example, include items concerning special populations, though not all states address all populations and the extent of detail in the review varies considerably. One state, which does give special popualtions extensive treatment, includes in its review procedure an entire section dealing with additional services for special populations. Further, a team member is assigned responsibility for data concerning the disadvantaged and handicapped. In another sample state, the self-evaluation for secondary vocational programs contains a section devoted to special services for disadvantaged and/or handicapped students. The instrument looks in detail at placement and programming of handicapped students in vocational classes, meeting the needs of handicapped and disadvantaged students, job placement of the disadvantaged or handicapped student, and program management. Some states also establish standards for acceptable levels of equal access. One, for example, has standards for vocational education which specify that the percentage of women, minority groups, disadvantaged and handicapped, and limited-English speaking students enrolled in vocational education in the region be the same as their respective percentage living in the region.

The common element of the attention given to special populations in the program reviews is that they focus on access to vocational programs. The evaluation of the results of programs for special populations in terms of student achievement and student employment success is given much less attention, at least in terms of the formal state board evaluation

system. In terms of student achievement, the lack of attention probably follows more from the general lack of acceptable measures for all vocational education programs than from a particular inattention to special populations. In terms of student employment success, the Vocational Education Data System does not currently require that student follow-up data be broken out by sex, race, ethnic background, and handicap, though such delineation is anticipated. At present, no breakdown by disadvantage is planned. Employer follow-up will include sex and race/ethnicity but not handicap or disadvantage. Consequently, many states do not collect the data needed to judge the employment success of special needs vocational students separately from all students.*

Another aspect of the emphasis on access to programs rather than on outcomes is that the evaluations generally focus on all services and do not separate the additional services provided to special needs populations. In some states, the additional services funded under the Vocational Education Act are monitored separately by the state staff responsible for handicapped and disadvantaged programs. In other states, however, the additional services may be evaluated as part of the overall program review process, but receive no special attention.

Other State Agency Activities

Beyond the provisions for administering federal funds, reporting on

* Other states, through their own management information systems, do collect data broken down by special populations. One, for example, has sex breakdowns of average hourly salary and employer ratings by Office of Education programs.

uses of funds and coordinating mechanisms, and evaluating the results of additional services, the 1976 Amendments contain no requirements for state agency activities for special needs populations. Unlike the provisions for promoting sex equity, there is no requirement for full-time state personnel nor an extensive list of functions to be performed.

Despite this minimal set of formal requirements, many states engage in a variety of state agency activities for special needs populations. Although there are no data available to test the existence of a direct relationship between the extent or types of state activity and the level of expenditure or quality of services for handicapped and disadvantaged students in vocational education, state activities are an important means of giving priority to special populations.

In this section, we will look briefly at the array of functions which state staff assigned to work with special populations perform. We will also look more closely at two common areas of state activity: efforts to coordinate with other state agencies and efforts to provide assistance to local education agencies attempting to serve these special populations.

Staff responsibilities. Most states have assigned at least one person to take major responsibility for working with at least one of the special populations. The number of staff and their responsibilities vary considerably among states, however.

The Abt Associates study found that the majority of its 15 sample states have one or two staff members working with special populations, although a significant proportion have more:

- Three states have one person who is responsible for all special needs populations.

- Three states have one person assigned to work with one special needs population, with the other populations unassigned; one

state has no one assigned to work with the handicapped, and two states have no one assigned to work with the disadvantaged.

- o Three states have two special needs staff members; one state has one person specifically assigned to the handicapped and one to the disadvantaged, while in the other two states, the two staff members work as a team for all populations.

- o Six states have special needs units of three or more staff members; this category includes two states in which state personnel are assisted by a group of full-time consultants who provide training and technical assistance to local districts.*

Interestingly, the number of special needs staff members is not directly related to the size of the sample states. In fact, the only consistent relationship between numberof special needs staff and state size is that the three states which have one person assigned to one population with the other populations left uncovered are all large states.

Staff in all but one of the 15 sample states appear to have no major job responsibilities other than special populations. The one exception is a small state in which the person assigned to special needs is also responsible for guidance and counseling. In analyzing the activities of the special needs staff, states can be categorized into one of two groups on the basis of staff orientation and responsibilities. Assignments to these categories must be separated by target popualtions, since a few states not only have different staff members dealing with each group but define the responsibilities of the staff members differently. The first category of special needs staff is administrative: in seven states for

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* This analysis focuses primarily on activities in the agency designated as the soel state agency for vocational education.

the handicapped and eight states for the disadvantaged, the major responsibilities of the staff are to review applications or proposals for funding, distribute funds among eligible recipients, and monitor their use. In other words, their major effort is to administer federal VEA funds. The second category is more programmatic, their emphasis being on leadership and technical assistance: in seven states for the handicapped and five for the disadvantaged, the special needs staff spend a major portion of their time in activities which support and actively promote services to these populations. These activities include, for example, issuing policy guidelines and handbooks on special needs populations, providing technical assistance and training to local districts, and working with other state agencies and universities to develop training materials, curricula, and programs. In some states in this second group, the special needs staff handle the administrative tasks as well, while in other states, the administrative tasks are taken care of by the financial staff of the agency. Within the sample states, there is no consistent relationship between the staff orientation to programs or administration and the size of the state or the number of special needs staff.

The mere fact that states can identify particular staff members with major responsibility for special needs populations suggests a certain level of commitment to serving these populations. Those states, however, in which the special needs staff not only administer the VEA funds but also provide leadership and technical assistance appear to be making an extra effort to assist local districts in serving handicapped and disadvantaged students in vocational education. In this role, their responsibilities, like the sex equity coordinators', have elements of a change agent. Many vocational

educators still need assistance and direction in serving special needs students: are still uncomfortable in instructing special needs students, particularly the handicapped, because they lack a full understanding of these students' problems and capabilities and the knowledge of teaching strategies to work with them. They may also lack ideas about how to use their set-aside and Subpart 4 funds most profitably. To the extent that state agency staff can support local staff in remedying these deficiencies, they are performing an important function in ultimately meeting the needs of special populations.

Activities with other state agencies. The state vocational education agency is clearly not the only governmental body administering services -- or even vocational education -- to handicapped, disadvantaged, and limited English-proficient students. In keeping with the emphasis in the 1976 Amendments on coordinated planning and service delivery, most state vocational education agencies work with other state agencies, although the extent of the cooperative effort varies both with category of special population and among states.

Most joint state agency activity for special needs populations focuses on the handicapped. There seems to be little evidence of extensive communication or joint activity between state special needs staff and state CETA staff around in-school disadvantaged youth. The interchange between vocational education staff and state CETA staff tends to be limited to the expenditure of 6 percent funds and not to involve the special needs staff. The 6 percent funds were administerd in the sample states by special sub-units within the vocational education agency and, in a number of states, these sub-units had little involvement with the rest of the agency. In some states, there is also contact between CETA and vocational

education staff over the 10 percent and 4 percent coordination monies, but this is sporadic and often takes the form of the vocational education agency applying for CETA funding rather than being involved in any joint planning or co-sponsorship of activities. There also appears to be little communication with state staff for Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, probably for the same reasons that there is little cooperative effort at the local level: target schools differ and, until recently, Title I focused almost exclusively on elementary students. For limited English-speaking students, there is probably contact between the state vocational education and bilingual staff in some states, but in the NIE studies we heard virtually nothing about it. Thus, the focus of the discussion on joint activities is on work with special education and vocational rehabilitation.

State vocational education agencies are involved in a variety of joint activities with the special education and vocational rehabilitation agencies, ranging from formal, written interagency agreements to close, informal working relationships among agency staff. Most states in the Abt Associates sample have an interagency agreement governing the delivery of services to handicapped students; other are in the process of developing agreements. Usually the agreement is between vocational education, vocational rehabilitation, and special education (though occasionally another agency, such as the Bureau for the Blind, is added, depending on the state structure). Typically, the agreements clarify each agency's areas of responsibility for service delivery to these clients in order to avoid duplication or gaps in service. Standing alone, as they do in some states, this type of written agreement constitutes the most limited level

of joint activity. In a few states, the written agreement goes further and becomes a master plan or policy statement for coordinated efforts.

In a number of the 15 sample states, staff from vocational and special education (and very often vocational rehabilitation) review -- or even participate in the development of -- the policy guidelines which each agency issues to its local service delivery system. A key policy decision in these reviews is freqently the addition to the special education policy of a specified role for vocational educators in the IEP process; in several states, the vocational education staff felt that their participation in developing special education policy was critical to success in this area.

In some sample states, the joint policy review is conducted by inter-divisional committees or task forces on the handicapped. These committees also have broader responsibilities for joint planning and, in at least two of our sample states, the committees review all secondary applications for funding for handicapped programs under the Vocational Education Act, the Handicapped Act, and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act.

Many sample states also have joint training and jointly sponsored local projects among the three agencies. Joint training is offered for both state agency and local staff. Most frequently, the training is funded by special education, with vocational educators being invited to attend. In terms of jointly sponsored local projects, many states mentioned projects such as evaluation centers and work experience programs which had been jointly operated by special education, vocational education, and vocational rehabilitation since 1970. In other cases, the examples were of local

vocational education projects funded with special education dollars.

Finally, in several states, state vocational education and special education staff describe close personal working relationships that go beyond specific assignments to task forces or sponsorship of particular activities. These staff talk with each other frequently to share ideas and thus informally coordinate, learn from one another, and help each other plan. In one state, the vocational education special needs person told us that his working relationship with the special education staff was so close that they even socialized together. In another state, a vocational education staff member and a special education staff member worked particularly closely because during at least one of many recent state reorganizations (when vocational education was dissolved as a separate division), they were assigned to the same unit.

Thus, in many states, there is an effort at the state agency to coordiante efforts for serving handicapped students. It appears that much of this activity predates the 1976 Education Amendments, beginning in 1970 withvocational rehabilitation, but also very much influenced by the passage of P.L. 94-142.

Assistance to local agencies. One of the major functions of the state special needs staff with a programmatic orientation, as stated earlier, is assisting local education agencies and other eligible recipients to become aware of the problems and capabilities of special needs students and to develop strategies for serving them. Where state staff are responsible

for both handicapped and disadvantaged students, both are covered by this assistance. The two most common forums for state assistance are cooperating with colleges and universities to provide courses, and providing technical assistance and training directly through state staff and state-hired consultants.

In terms of cooperating with colleges and universities, several states use a portion of their VEA funding to support teacher training institutions in providing courses on special needs populations. In other cases, the state agency works with the teacher training institutions to obtain the support and agreement for efforts in this area, but do not directly fund them. Courses on special needs populations are directed both at college students who are preparing to teach and at current teachers who are returning for additional education. Often a series of courses is offered covering a variety of topics ranging from psychological or sociological analyses of the problems to special needs students to methods of teaching these students. Again, there seems to be a heavier emphasis on handicapped than on disadvantaged or limited-English proficient students. Several states have joint or associate credentialing programs in which vocational educators, by taking a series of special education courses, earn a teaching credential in special education, or vice versa for special education teachers.

State staff and consultants provide training and technical assistance themselves through workshops and sessions offered at conferences, by visits to individual schools, and by the dissemination of policy guidelines and

curriculum materials. Most frequently, workshops on special populations are held during larger regional or state conferences for vocational education. Usually formal sessions are held only a few times a year and for a limited period of time (in contrast with a college course, which lasts over a period of weeks). In most states, the state special needs staff also work with the staff of individual districts. The frequency of these visits varies, and in some cases waits for a school-initiated request: one district official reports that he makes heavy demands on the special needs consultant for his region, estimating that he had met with her eight to ten times by March of that school year. A number of states have issued or are in the process of issuing policy guidelines. At least one state has used VEA funds to support a dissemination center based in one of the state universities. The center collects curriculum materials and descriptions of exemplary practices for special needs students in vocational education. It then distributes these through a regularly issued newsletter, conference programs and exhibits, workshops and inservice programs.

Like the sex equity coordinators, the special needs staff frequently begin their assistance with awareness training. One state, for example, offers extensive awareness workshops for groups of 40 instructors and administrators in different parts of the state. For two days, staff members from different schools and holding different positions worked in an elaborate role play scenario to address the problems of serving special needs students in vocational education.

Special needs staff also frequently provide technical assistance

related to the administration of the Vocational Education Act. They assist local staff in preparing long-range plans and preparing applications for funding. They also assist the districts in defining and documenting excess costs. Usually these activities take place during the state staff visits to individual schools, but at least one sample state held regional workshops last year on excess costs because the requirement was of such widespread concern.

In some cases, special needs staff also conduct on-site program reviews, usually as part of the overall agency program review process, but occasionally independently.

There are no data available on the effectiveness of this wide range of activities with local agencies. At the very least, however, they serve to draw attention to special needs populations. They are also consistent with the recommendation made repeatedly in the next section that technical assistance is in many cases the most effective strategy for improving local service delivery to special needs populations.

Policy Implications

Funds administration. Based on the information available for this paper, it appears that the set-asides and Subpart 4 funds are successful in directing more resources to services for special needs populations than they would otherwise receive, though in many cases the amount of resources is limited. Several state administrators admit that without the mandated set-asides, they would probably continue to serve handicapped and disadvantaged students, but not at the high level that the current legislation

requires. Consequently the set-asides should be retained.

The impact of the excess cost and matching requirements which accompany the set-asides is less clear. From this study, we cannot determine the extentto which the difficulties cited by administrators are inherent to the requirements and therefore lasting as opposed to being simply functions of inexperience in dealing with these concepts. In the absence of that determination, the excess cost and matching requirements should be retained on the assumption that this approach supports the federal role as a catalyst to state and local efforts, and that the difficulties which the states currently face will diminish as they gain experience in these areas. However, the policy of allowing districts to apply federal reimbursement to the full costs of separate programs for special needs students while only applying federal funds to the excess costs of mainstreamed programs should be altered. While no administrators in the Abt study spoke of this policy as a barrier to mainstreaming, it certainly does not serve as a positive incentive either. Congress should consider altering the policy, for example, by supporting separate programs only for the costs above the per-pupil costs in the district of providing vocational education to non-handicapped and non-disadvantaged students. Also, OVAE should be encouraged to provide increased technical assistance to local education agencies. OVAE should also be encouraged to monitor the effectiveness of the revised matching requirements to determine whether its procedures for seeking a waiver are so restrictive that states do not take advantage of the new requirements. Congress should also monitor the set-aside expenditures to determine whether states are indeed mastering the excess cost and matching requirements, or whether those requirements

serve as continuing disincentives to the use of federal funds.

State agency activities. The role currently played by vocational education agency staff in many states to provide leadership in serving special needs populations rather than simply administering federal funds is important. To formalize this role, Congress should amend the law to direct states to provide leadership through:

- policy development;
- technical assistance to local districts;
- evaluation and monitoring of local activities; and
- coordination with other state agencies serving special needs populations.

Such a provision should take the form of a broad policy statement. It should not require states to appoint full-time personnel, comparable to those required for sex equity, nor specify structures for implementing these functions. Such requirements would be overly restrictive and seem unnecessary since many states are already active in this area. Rather that prescribing the details of how the leadership role should be carried out, the federal government should hold the state accountable for fulfilling the leadership role by requiring reporting in the state plan, as described below, and through subsequent monitoring and review by OVAE.

In carrying out their leadership role, state staff should maintain and in many cases extend their activities in two areas emphasized in this paper: coordination with other state agencies and assistance to local agencies serving special needs populations. State staff responsible for special needs populations should be encouraged through technical assistance provided by OVAE to work closely with state staff for special education,

and CETA to develop more integrated service delivery practices. Working with other state agencies should be directed to the activities in which some states are already engaged: developing interagency agreements for service delivery responsibility, reviewing policies and proposals for other agencies, and jointly sponsoring training and local programs. Providing technical assistance to local agencies should also be continued and expanded, for as the next section emphasizes, it appears to be a key element in improving services to special needs populations. OVAE should assist states to develop the most effective strategies for providing technical assistance.

Reporting. To support the leadership and management role of the state agency staff and to improve the usefulness of state planning documents, the requirements for addressing special needs populations in the five-year and annual plan should be changed. In place of the current provisions, states should be required to describe the activities which the state agency will undertake to support special needs populations in terms of:

- policy development;
- technical assistance;
- evaluation and monitoring; and
- coordination with other state agencies.

Such a plan should be similar to many of the sex equity plans already included in the state plans. It should not simply play back the requirements for serving special needs populations or list only broad goals and objectives but should be a working document which lays out planned activities and an approximate schedule for accomplishing them.

To aid states in developing these plans, OVAE staff should again provide technical assistance. They should also be required to review the completed plans for quality, not simply compliance.

Evaluation. The process of evaluating additional services to special needs populations can also support the state agencies' leadership and management role since the evaluation should provide state staff with information on which to monitor and provide technical assistance to invididual local agencies. To respond to the finding that many states are not meeting federal requirements in this area, the enforcement of the current regulations should be strengthened. Recognizing that evaluation systems require time and resources first to develop and then to implement, states should be encouraged to evaluate services for special populations whenever possible through their larger evaluation system rather than by developing a wholly separate system. However, the evaluation findings for special needs populations should be reported separately and should focus on additional services not merely access to vocaticnal programs. Also, the evaluations should include some measures of the outcomes or results of services to special needs populations, though these measures should not be limited to placement rates. They also do not need to be reported every year for every student as VEDS requires; instead, sampling of students and periodit evaluations should be encouraged.

If states need time to develop an evaluation system for special needs populations, they should be required to include in their state plan a detailed plan with a specific timetable for development and implementation. The plan should be a real workplan not just a general

statement of intention with an indefintie schedule. To support these requirements, OVAE should, first, provide technical assistance to state agencies in developing their workplan and/or their evaluation system and, second, enforce the requirement that states are to evaluate the results of additional services to special needs populations.

LOCAL BEHAVIOR AND IMPLEMENTATION

Local education agencies are obviously key to reaching the federal goal of providing special needs populations with ready access to vocational education. Ultimately, the implementation of the Vocational Education Act and, more broadly, all services to students with special needs depend on local actions because it is at the local level that services are actually delivered to students. As will be discussed in this section, however, the 1976 Amendments appear to have had only a limited impact on local activities for special needs students.

This limited impact stems from several sources. First, the impact of the VEA is influenced by the governmental structure through which the law is administered in terms of both the communication from federal to state to local agencies and the control one layer of government exerts over the layer below it. As stated earlier, the law goes through successive interpretations as it is implemented and communicated by the federal and state vocational education agencies to local agencies. At each level, as the law is interpreted in light of agency and individual understanding and priority, the emphasis or even the content of the Congressional message may change. Moreover, the federal and state agencies responsible for administering the VEA do not have full control over local actions. Again as stated earlier, all provisions of Part A of the Act are administered by the state agency for vocational education; the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) has no direct line of communication with local agencies under this part. But state agencies have limited authority because of the

emphasis in most states on local autonomy, through both statute and common practice. In the case of vocational education, this emphasis is heightened by the small proportion which federal dollars -- and in many cases, state dollars also -- contribute to the total funding of vocational education. One repeatedly hears both state and local vocational educators liken federal attempts to drive the vocational education enterprise to the proverbial tail wagging the dog. In this context of deference to local autonomy, state agencies are important to the implementation of the VEA in that they control the federal message which is conveyed to the local district, but they do not have the authority, or the inclination, to dictate local implementation completely. They can offer incentives such as funds and technical assistance to encourage implementation but have only limited sanctions for enforcing compliance.

Second, the impact of the law is limited by the structure of the VEA in that the law has multiple goals and allows a variety of activities to be supported by federal funds. As a result, attention to any one area in terms of both technical assistance and enforcement is diluted. Also, because activities supported by VEA tend to be diverse and in most cases comprise only a small piece of a vocational education program or project, they are often not visible.

Third, the implementation and impact of the VEA are influenced by the local context in which the law is applied. Local education agencies, even more than state vocational agencies, are not organized solely to implement federal law. They have independent goals, priorities and political

pressures. To the extent that these are consistent with federal requirements and intention, they will undoubtedly enhance the implementation of federal law. To the extent that they override or conflict with federal requirements, the implementation of the federal law will suffer. Moreover vocational education in many local agencies is only one curriculum among many. Unless an institution is organized primarily for the delivery of vocational education -- e.g., it is a regional vocational school or a technical institute -- vocational education will have to compete for attention and resources within the school system. At a time of high inflation, and in some localities tax limits which restrict budgets, and at a time when other issues -- e.g., basic skills, special education -- may have priority over vocational education, vocational education in general may not get the attention and resources it needs and therefore cannot move in all directions VEA suggests. When services for special populations, then, must compete for attention and resources with the other program goals in vocational education, they are likely not to receive the priority they need. Finally, the structure of the local district or institution influences the vocational education options available. High school districts which offer vocational education only in comprehensive high schools, for example, will probably have a more limited range of programs than districts with separate vocational schools or which send students to regional vocational centers.

Fourth, the implementation and impact of the VEA are affected by several factors specific to populations with special needs. First, special needs populations are difficult to serve appropriately. By definition, they require additional resources to provide the special assistance that is needed to enable them to succeed in vocational education.

In some cases -- for example, with physically handicapped individuals -- the appropriate assistance is readily identified and obtained. In other cases, such as severely mentally retarded or severely academically disadvantaged students, the problems faced by individuals with special needs are difficult to overcome. Although the VEA -- as well as other federal laws -- defines categories or groups with special populations, these groups are comprised of individuals who frequently have needs which differ from one another. Ideally, educators should tailor a program of activities and support services to each individual in the vocational program of his or her choice. Frequently, however, local agencies do not have the resources for this approach. Therefore, special needs students -- like most students in public education -- are taught in groups which may not be precisely attuned to their needs.

Addressing the problems of special needs students in vocational education is further complicated by the reluctance of some vocational educators to work with these students. In part, their reluctance stems from a personal hesitation about teaching special needs students, particularly those with physical or severe mental handicaps. Many instructors lack training in teaching special needs students and, therefore, do not understand the students' problems and are not familiar with strategies for overcoming those problems. In part, the reluctance stems from a concern for the success and quality of their vocational education program. A number of vocational educators feel that the goal of giving priority to special populations in regular programs of vocational education conflicts with the goal of preparing workers for the labor force. They are particularly concerned that, according to

federal requirements, a primary measure of success of vocational programs is the number of program completers placed in occupations related to their training. This goal together with the desire to create or maintain an image of vocational education as a high quality program leads vocational educators to seek to attract high ability students who will perform well in their courses, be easily placed in jobs and perform well there too. Bringing large numbers of special needs students, they argue, runs counter to these goals.

Another factor in implementing the VEA which is particularly related to special needs populations is that the VEA is not the only or even the most prominent federal program with a role in providing vocational training to populations with special needs. Other federal programs, most prominently CETA, vocational rehabilitation under the Rehabilitation Act and special education under the Education of the Handicapped Act, as amended by P.L. 94-142, play a major role. And in contrast with VEA for which attention to special populations is merely one of many goals, each of these laws focuses entirely on a particular set of target groups. Moreover, the activities operated under the other laws tend to be more visible. They are programs which are fully federally funded or governed by extensive federal regulations and which therefore carry their program identification to the school level. As a result, these programs tend to dominate VEA in providing vocational programs to persons with special needs.

Thus, the local implementation of the special needs provisions

of the VEA is affected by a variety of factors: the governmental structure through which the law is administered, the structure of the law, the local context in which the law is implemented, and the nature of services to special populations.

In this section, we will describe the local implementation of the Vocational Education Act and analyze these factors which affect that implementation. We will also look more broadly at the strategies used to serve special populations, regardless of their relation to the VEA. Together, this information will provide not only an understanding of the ways in which the current impact of the VEA is limited but also a basis for drawing conclusions about the appropriate future role for the federal government in serving special needs populations in vocational education.

To accomplish these objectives, this section will examine three questions:

- How are special needs students defined, identified and placed in programs of vocational education?
- What strategies are used to serve special needs students?
- What planning and reporting activities do local agencies undertake for special needs students?

Definition, Identification and Placement

The set of first questions to be addressed in determining how local agencies are serving special needs populations in vocational education is:

- What operational definitions are used?
- How are students identified and their needs assessed?
- How are they placed in vocational programs?

In this section, we will examine these issues separately for handicapped, disadvantaged and limited-English proficient students because the answers to the questions are different for each. At the same time, the legislative and administrative mechanisms for dealing with each population are in many cases similar. Therefore, the implications of current local activities will be discussed in most detail for the first population analyzed, the handicapped, and then referred to when appropriate in the discussions of the other target groups.

The relevant provisions of the 1976 Amendments in this area define who is to receive service as special needs students. The regulations extend the law by defining disadvantaged and limited English proficient in more detail and by requiring that vocational plans for handicapped students be coordinated with the Individual Education Plan (IEP) under P.L. 94-142.

1. Handicapped

The key feature of the process by which handicapped students are defined, identified and placed is the prominence of the federal Education for the Handicapped Act and state special education laws and the special education staff who carry them out.

The definition of handicapped included in the 1976 Amendments and the regulations which accompany them is taken directly from the definition used in the Education for the Handicapped Act, as amended by PL 94-142. In addition, the Amendments specify that the students defined as handicapped

under VEA cannot succeed in the regular vocational education program without special education assistance or require a modified vocational education program.

While all students classified as handicapped in vocational education appear to fall within the mandated definition, not all types of individuals mentioned in the definition are served equally, either in terms of access to vocational programs or quantity of services received. Physically and sensory handicapped students, for example, have greater access to regular vocational programs in community colleges than trainable mentally retarded students. Learning disabled and emotionally impaired students receive fewer services in vocational education than the educable mentally retarded.

Also, there is confusion about the definition of handicaps in some areas. In general, there are no apparent difficulties in labelling students with physical handicaps and with severe mental retardation. There are problems, however, in the criteria used to identify students with minimal retardation, specific learning disabilities and emotional handicaps because these students are academically disadvantaged and have behaviorial problems.

One response to the confusion between the two categories -- handicapped and disadvantaged -- is simply to place students in one of them. Such an action, however, depends on decisions about the underlying causes of the students' problems and thus may require subjective judgments by local officials. And assigning students to one category rather than the other, may affect the services and resources to which they have access: vocational

options and support services may differ for handicapped and academically disadvantaged students. For example, handicapped students in some districts receive more services than academically disadvantaged students because of the additional resources -- and requirements -- surrounding handicapped students because of state and federal special education laws.

Another response to the confusion in categorizing students as handicapped or disadvantaged is to combine the categories. Three of the fifteen districts in the Nellum study, for example, combined the two categories and labelled the students as educationally or learning handicapped. However, among these handicapped students were many who needed special assistance not because of learning disabilities, emotional problems, or other psychological or perceptual problems, but because of social, education and economic conditions. In combining the cetegories, then, students with different needs are assigned to the same program when the program may not meet all of their needs adequately.

Unfortunately, this type of confusion is hard to resolve through federal legislation because the problem stems not from a poorly written law or simple failure by local educators to comply with the law, but from the nature of the problem being addressed. Human problems do not fall into neat categories: individuals with multiple problems fall equally into several categories; diagnoses of marginal problems are difficult to make accurately. New legislation, at best, might address the issue by including decision rules for assigning students. Students in the gray area between handicapped and acadmically disadvantaged, for example, could always be classified as disadvantaged on the grounds that it is a less

onerous label than handicapped. Or students could be classified into whichever group has more resources available, taking into account not only VEA but all sources of special funding for that group. Such rules are not entirely sutiable, however, The first is arbitrary and ignores problems of differential resources. The second would be difficult to administer and enforce. Both limit local flexibility which may be good in districts which are not sincerely attempting to serve these students in the best manner but which is overly restrictive in districts which are trying their best. On this issue -- as with many of the service delivery issues which follow -- the best approach to dealing with the problem appears to be administrative rather than legislative: the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) and the state vocational education agencies should provide technical assistance to local agencies in assessing student problems and providing students with appropriate services.

The identification and assessment of needs of handicapped students at the secondary level is also done through the special education process established under federal and state special education laws. In some districts, the presence of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is the sole criterion by which students in vocational education are judged to be handicapped: without an IEP, a student who needs special assistance in order to succeed in vocational education is disadvantaged, not handicapped. In one state, according to state agency staff, some small schools do not have an IEP process and therefore do not claim VEA funds under the handicapped set-aside but only under the disadvantaged set-aside.

Most handicapped students are identified through the special education process in the early elementary grades. Usually, the students' progress is then reviewed, and updated IEPs are developed as the students enter high school. The purpose of the review is to plan the student's high school program and, in some cases to determine the most appropriate vocational options available. One Southern metropolitan school district, for example, develops a detailed vocational education plan during the ninth grade for all exceptional students entering the high schools.

The practice of using an existing set of procedures, particularly procedures mandated by another federal law, to identify handicapped secondary students who need assistance in order to succeed in vocational education is basically sound. Establishing an entirely separate procedure for vocational education would be burdensome to local agencies and unnecessarily duplicative. The problem with using the special education procedures in practice is that they are, not surprisingly, controlled by special educators. As a result, they are not necessarily geared to vocational education and include no formal role in the assessment and planning process for vocational educators. In some school districts, special educators and vocational educators have developed a cooperative working relationship. In others, however, there is tension between the two groups. Vocational educators argue that decisions are made to place handicapped students in vocational programs without adequate knowledge of students' abilities or of the requirements of different occupational areas: no formal vocational assessments are done and vocational educators are not consulted to obtain their judgments. As a result,

vocational educators claim, handicapped students are inappropriately placed. Special educators, on the other hand, often criticize vocational educators for their lack of knowledge about handicapped students and for their reluctance to accept these students in vocational education programs. As a first step in remedying these difficulties, Congress should consider amending the Education for the Handicapped Act to mandate some form of involvement for vocational educators in the IEP process.

Another feature of the identification, assessment and placement process for handicapped students at the secondary level is that placement options are limited. The options are limited, first, in that contrary to VEA policy, few handicapped students are placed in regular programs of vocational education. The infrequent use of mainstreaming generally does not result from an assessment of individual interests and abilities but from three sets of contextual factors:

- the attitudes of school staff and parents;
- the organization of educational programs; and
- the architecture of the physical facilities.

(These factors, and those which determine placement in separate programs will be discussed in more detail in the section on strategies for serving handicapped students.)

The majority of students identified as handicapped, then, are placed in special, separate programs of vocational education. Here too, factors other than individual student interests and abilities determine a student's placement. The two factors which most commonly determine the type of special program in which students are placed are:

- the availability of programs in the district; and
- the nature of the students' disabilities.

Generally, in larger cities and towns, school districts offer two options for handicapped students: trainable mentally retarded and multiple handicapped students are often served in separate programs in separate schools while the educable mentally retarded, the physically handicapped and some of the learning disabled and emotionally impaired are placed in separate programs or classes in the regular high school. Where these options exist, students are channeled into them according to their disabilities with no consideration of possible alternative strategies of providing service. Students also have no choice of occupational areas: they take what is offered in the separate program.

In small districts where there are no special secondary programs for the handicapped, the students are often assigned to regional centers or county schools for exceptional children. Since the cost for such services tends to be high, only those students with the most severe disabilities are referred. Students with less severe disabilities -- in some cases, the educable mentally retarded, and more frequently, the learning disabled and emotionally impaired -- are placed in the regular school programs without support services.

The problem of placements based on factors other than an assessment of individual interests and abilities is another issue that is difficult to resolve with changes in the VEA. The law already contains a policy of serving students in regular vocational programs whenever possible. This policy could only be changed by taking out the phrase "whenever possible" to make the policy of mainstreaming absolute. But

that change would be educationally irresponsible. Even special educators talk not of the goal of placing all handicapped students in regular programs but of serving students in the least restrictive environment because they realize that some students are best served in separate programs. Nor can the law mandate that a school district create a particular number of program options. The emphasis on local autonomy together with the reality of limited local resources preclude the federal government from dictating the structure of local vocational program offerings -- unless the federal government is willing to pay for them. The alternative to changing the law itself is to change its administration: OVAE and the state vocational education agencies should provide technical assistance to local agencies to encourage them to address program options and accompanying placement procedures more creatively and possibly to use their set-aside funds to support these activities.

The process of identifying, assessing and placing handicapped students is quite different at the post-secondary than at the secondary level because post-secondary institutions are not governed by PL 94-142. In those institutions with handicapped student services offices or diagnostic intake centers (which serve all students), handicapped students are identified primarily through self-referral, though the referral is often made at the suggestion of an instructor or guidance counselor. Counselors in the handicapped student services office or diagnostic centers typically develop an individualized plan to meet the needs of the students. In these instances, there is no special difficulty in assessing the needs of handicapped students -- or, reportedly, in providing

the additional services they require. In those institutions without special handicapped offices or diagnostic capabilities, however, post-secondary administrators argue that they have difficulty identifying and assessing the needs of handicapped students because they do not have a team of special educators on their staff.

The identification of post-secondary students as handicapped does not appear to restrict their vocational options to the same extent as handicapped secondary students. Perhaps because there are fewer of these special needs students at the post-secondary level, they are apt to enroll in regular vocational education programs and be assisted with supportive services.

A number of post-secondary administrators claim that they have difficulty with the VEA use of the PL 94-142 definition of handicap. Their problem comes not in actually serving students with the disabilities listed in that definition but with the extra effort required to label students according to those categories. In some cases they argue that the labeling is so burdensome that they serve handicapped students but do not claim VEA reimbursement for them. One suggestion for easing this burden is to adopt the definition of handicapped contained in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (PL 93-112) as the post-secondary definition of handicapped in the VEA. This definition essentially states that a handicapped person is any person who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. While this definition is probably familiar to post-secondary administrators

since they work more with Section 504 than PL 94-142 and is certainly easier to administer than the PL 94-142 definition, it also is a much broader definition. If adopted in the VEA, many more students would be eligible for service under the handicapped set-aside. Since the set-aside allocation going to individual institutions is in many cases quite small, it would seem unwise to dilute the use of that allocation by spreading it among a larger group of eligible students.

2. Disadvantaged

The 1976 Amendments define disadvantaged as persons (other than handicapped persons) who have academic or economic handicaps and who require special services and assistance in order to enable them to succeed in vocational education. The regulations extend this definition, as mandated by Congress, to specify the operational criteria by which academic and economic disadvantage will be determined.

The key element of this definition is that it distinguishes between academic and economic disadvantage. This distinction is very important in practice for the two groups are treated quite differently. Typically, far more attention goes to academically disadvantaged in providing special services.

Academically disadvantaged

For academically disadvantaged students, the operational definition of disadvantaged used by many secondary schools is linked to performance on standardized or minimum competency tests -- e.g. reads two levels below grade level -- or to procedures established by Title I of ESEA or state compensatory aid legislation. In other secondary districts, the definition

and identification of academically disadvantaged is much broader and more informal. According to state officials in at least one state, for example, disadvantaged students are defined for purposes of reimbursement under the VEA as any students who are having difficulty with any portion of their vocational curriculum. In another district, race irrespective of performance on standardized measures, is a sufficient criterion for categorizing students as academically disadvantaged.

These definitions and the identification procedures which accompany them commonly focus on strictly academic skills. With the exception of the state which defines disadvantaged students as any students having problems in their vocational programs, it appears that schools rarely use identification procedures which are defined in terms of work-related and basic employment skills. Also, the placement of disadvantaged students seldom involves vocational educators. As a rule, all students in a school district are tested in the areas of reading and math using standardized tests. Then, in most cases, grade advisors and guidance counselors place students in remedial and compensatory programs. Thus, students are identified as academically disadvantaged before placement in vocational education programs is in question.

In many cases, according to the Nellum study, placement in remedial and compensatory programs is not only separate from but may actually interfere with student enrollment in vocational education: vocational education is viewed as an elective to be taken only after the compensatory basic skill requirements have been met.

When academically disadvantaged students are placed in vocational

education programs, their placement options tend to be more limited than other students' though not to the same extent as handicapped students. Placement typically depends on three factors:

- the student's academic achievement;
- the availability of slots in given programs; and
- the nature of the vocational program offered in the school district.

Consequently, placement in regular vocational programs is sometimes limited by competitive entrance requirements to those programs: when the demand for a program exceeds the number of places available, vocational educators typically select the brighest and most well-behaved students to enhance their programs' image and evaluation success.

Academically disadvantaged students are usually placed in separate vocational programs when their academic performance is several years below grade level and when they have behavior problems. A number of separate programs are directed at potential dropouts who would not remain in school in a regular program. In these instances, the special placement appears to be appropriate to student needs. In other cases, however, academically disadvantaged students may be grouped with learning and emotionally disabled students for instruction under the heading of educationally handicapped. As mentioned in the previous section, this placement is more questionable.

The major issue, then, in considering changes in the VEA as it pertains to academically disadvantaged students is in the definition of who is to be identified as disadvantaged. To some extent, the range of operational definitions of academic disadvantaged used by local

districts indicates that the current law is not being properly implemented. The remedy here is to increase enforcement of the law. In part, however, the range of definitions suggests that the definition in the law is too broad. With so many students eligible for service, the impact of the legislation is diluted particularly in light of the limited funds available from the set-asides. Congress therefore should consider further limiting its definition of academic disadvantage in the VEA. In doing so, consideration should be given to using a definition contained in other federal legislation such as Title I of ESEA. Using an existing federal definition would not only address the issue of focusing VEA attention but would make coordination between these federal programs easier. Too frequently, several federal laws are targeted at basically the same populations but differences in the requirements of each law, including eligibility criteria, preclude effective coordination.

The delivery of services to acadmically disadvantaged students could also be improved by linking the identification and placement of these students more closely to vocational education both in terms of the involvement of vocational educators in the identification process and the relation of remediation to enrollment in vocational courses. These improvements should be made, however, by providing technical assistance not by changing the law.

At the post-secondary level, academic disadvantaged is defined in terms of students' past grades, performance on college level entrance examinations and teacher recommendations. Admissions officers review student records and determine whether remediation is needed. Remedial offerings tend to be highly individualized allowing for open entry and

exit and are competency based. In addition to placing students in remedial programs upon entrance to the college, students who experience difficulty once in occupational programs are often referred to a media or resource center for assistance. In some cases, such as Florida's Individualized Manpower Training System, activities are quite structured and fully automated. In other instances, colleges employ tutors or aides.

While many community colleges thus appear to be making an effort to serve academically disadvantaged students, the Nellum study indicates that there are still problems in serving these students. Most prominently, the drop-out rates for disadvantaged students are high and the participation of the disadvantaged population in the more technical programs is low. Community college administrators attribute these problems to the fact that many disadvantaged students come with such severe deficiencies that remedial services are not sufficient to provide them with the minimum competencies required for particpation in the program of their choice.

Also at the post-secondary level, the definition of academically disadvantaged may be too broad. Congress should consider focusing it more narrowly, though it is not clear that adopting the same definitions used at the secondary level will be appropriate. If one criterion in selecting a new secondary definition is making use of a federal definition already in use, the advantages of that definition at the secondary level in terms of ease of administration and the potential for easier coordination among federal programs will not necessarily apply at the post-secondary level.

Economically disadvantaged

The operational definition of economically disadvantaged at the secondary level is often based on eligibility for or participation in other programs for low income individuals and families such as free lunch, CETA, AFDC or public aid assistance. In some instances, local staff also identify economically disadvantaged students on the basis of personal knowledge of the individual or family's circumstances. In most districts, families are required to document their low income status, which many are reluctant to do; they see documentation as an invasion of privacy and do not want to be labelled as poor. Consequently, many economically disadvantaged families do not volunteer for participation at the secondary level.

Classification as an economically disadvantaged student rarely affects the student's placement in vocational education. Few school districts offer any services geared to economically disadvantaged students in vocational education. Most frequently these students are assisted with health or nutrition programs, such as free lunches, or with work study programs. Also, placement in work study programs is made by guidance counselors not vocational educators.

Where special vocational education programs are offered to economically disadvantaged students, these students are often lumped together with other disadvantaged students including academically disadvantaged and limited English proficient students and with learning disabled or emotionally handicapped students. Grouping them with the same treatment indicates, as stated previously, that the students are

often placed in programs without consideration to their specific needs.

At the post-secondary level, economically disadvantaged students are defined and identified through their applications for financial aid. There is no evidence that this information is used to provide any services related to vocational education: economic disadvantagement is not seen as an issue of succeeding programmatically but of being able to afford school.

Thus at both the secondary and post-secondary level, economically disadvantaged students receive few if any special services in vocational education by virtue of their economic (as opposed to academic) status. The fact that the identification process which flows naturally from the federal definition has nothing to do with educational capabilities together with the fact that local agencies provide to these students services which are linked to their lack of money -- e.g. work study programs or tuition assistance -- suggest that the inclusion of economic disadvantage as a separate category of eligibility for individuals in need of assistance in programs of vocational education is not appropriate. Congress should consider changing the definition in one of several ways. One option would be to require all disadvantaged students to meet both economic and academic criteria of eligibility. Since low income is of concern because it is assumed to be associated with difficulties in academic performance, this approach would formalize that assumption. The approach would also narrow the definition of academic disadvantage as we earlier suggested was needed. On balance, however, this option would seem to narrow the definition of disadvantage too greatly and also

be difficult to administer. A second option would be to drop the concept of economic disadvantagement entirely from the eligibility requirements for the disadvantaged set-aside and subpart 4 funds. Only academically disadvantaged individuals would be eligible for those funds. Selecting this option would not mean that the VEA would not give priority to the economically disadvantaged. Priority would be given not to individuals but to areas through the economic factors already included in the requirements for distributing all Subpart 2 and 3 funds and in targeting Subpart 4 and 5 funds. A variation on this second option would be to take the general approach of targeting funds to low income areas and then serving academically disadvantaged students within those areas one step further by adopting a Title I approach. Under Title I, economic factors determine not only how much funding a district receives (which is what VEA is supposed to do currently) but also how the funds are distributed among schools within the district.

3. Limited-English Proficient

As defined in the 1976 Amendments, limited-English proficient individuals are those who were not born in the United States or whose native tongue is a language other than English, who come from environments where a language other than English is dominant, and who therefore have difficulties speaking and understanding instruction in English.

At the secondary level, local agencies operationally define limited-English proficient students on the basis of the procedures used to identify them. While these procedures vary considerably, they typically involve some form of testing of English language skills and are administered by the bilingual education office with no input from vocational educators.

Procedures for placing LEP students in vocational education classes

are typically the same as for all students because most local agencies do not provide any special bilingual services to high school students.

Even where academic bilingual programs are offered at the secondary level, they may limit rather than enhance access to vocational education programs. In New York City, for example, bilingual services exist at comprehensive high schools but not vocational high schools. Because guidance counselors generally channel entering high school students to those schools with programs which best meet their language needs, LEP students' access to vocational programs is limited to the occupational course offerings available in those comprehensive schools.

When LEP students seek to participate in regular vocational programs, admission depends on each student's ability to meet the regular academic and language requirements. Rather than making special efforts to recruit or encourage placement of LEP students in regular vocational programs, many school districts in effect do the opposite since vocational education teachers consider the ability to speak and understand English fluently to be critical for success in their classes. Consequently, they reject applications from students who cannot meet basic language requirements. Teachers and guidance counselors, however, indicate that few students are rejected for language reasons only since most students are proficient in English by the time they enter high school. Regardless of the explanation, few LEP students in the districts visited for the Nellum study participate in regular vocational programs even when a large proportion of the student population is H spanic or Asian American. Two, possibly conflicting, explanations are given for this pattern --neither has been verified.

On the one hand, school district staff claim that there are few LEP students in the high schools: by the time LEP students reach high school, they are proficient in English and therefore are no longer categorized as LEP. On the other hand, community advocates argue that the reason there are few LEP students in the high schools is that the schools do not provide special bilingual services at the secondary level and most LEP students experiencing academic failure and frustration therefore drop out of school during their sophomore and junior years.

At the post-secondary level in institutions where the enrollment of LEP students is relatively high, the identification of students and assessment of their needs are made immediately on entrance. A recommendation is then made for placement in regular classes, basic skill remediation classes or ESL classes. If either of the last two are required, LEP students generally have to complete at least one term of that sequence before enrolling in occupational programs. Otherwise placement procedures for LEP students in vocational education programs are the same as for all students, i.e., based on interest and ability.

A post-secondary student who experiences language difficulties when already enrolled in an occupational program is generally identified and referred by the instructor for individualized support services such as the assignment of a bilingual peer tutor.

Thus, community colleges appear to be doing fairly well in serving limited-English proficient students though it is not clear how many students they serve. At the secondary level, however, the situation for LEP students is similar to that of the economically disadvantaged

in that they are identified but few special efforts are being made to provide them with access to programs of vocational education. Where they are served, it is usually because they are academically disadvantaged. These problems should be addressed, however, not by altering the legislation but through increased enforcement of the current requirements defining LEP students and setting minimun levels of expenditures for these students. Local districts should also be provided with technical assistance to aid them in developing strategies for idenfifying and serving LEP students.

Strategies for Serving Special Needs Students

In examining the strategies used by local agencies, both secondary and post-secondary, to serve special needs students, this section will consider three questions:

- With what assistance and support are special needs students provided?
- What range of vocational options are available to these students?
- What types of activities are supported with VEA funds?

The provisions of VEA which apply in this area are few and non-restrictive: VEA funds under Subparts 2 and 3 and Subpart 4 for the disadvantaged can be used for a broad range of activities. Some state agencies limit the uses to which VEA funds can be put, but the federal law itself is permissive. The constraining aspect of these funds stems from the excess cost and matching requirements discussed under State Behavior and Implementation. The law also contains a policy that

assistance to special needs students is to be provided whenever possible in regular programs of vocational education.

As in the previous section, strategies for handicapped, disadvantaged and limited-English proficient students will be described separately because local agencies in most cases approach each differently.

1. Handicapped

At the secondary level, the strategies for providing vocational education and work experience to handicapped students are complex and diverse. The differences in strategies can be examined in relation to two dimensions of success of activities for special needs populations:

- the extent to which they provide handicapped students with entry level job skills, and
- the range of vocational options they provide for students.

The primary distinction among strategies for handicapped students is placement in regular versus separate vocational programs, though there are important distinctions among strategies within each category and some strategies which combine the two.

As stated in the previous section, the placement of handicapped students at the secondary level in separate programs is much more common than their placement in regular programs. Nellum identifies three types of factors which work against the placement of handicapped in regular vocational education programs:

- attitudes of staff and parents;
- the organization of educational programs; and
- the architecture of the physical facilities.

The attitudes of school staff including building principals, vocational education instructors and special educators are key to the placement of handicapped students. Principals affect access through the school policies and general tone they set and the programs they support. Vocational educators, however, actually control the access to regular vocational programs. In some cases, they explicitly restrict the number of handicapped students who can be mainstreamed, and specify the handicapping conditions accpetable to them and the particular programs in which handicapped students can be placed. In other cases, no actual limits on placement are established but specific safety criteria have to be met by the students before the are accepted. Vocational educators appear to establish these barriers to their programs for two reasons. First, they are uncomfortable working with handicapped students because they lack the skills -- or sometimes the willingness -- to modify their teaching practices to accomodate the needs of these students. Second, they fear that the quality and image of their programs will be affected if special education students are given unrestricted access to the programs: they fear that vocational education will once again be considered by guidance counselors and other school staff to be dumping grounds for problem children who are placed inappropriately and not given the support necessary to succeed. These latter anxieties may result in part from the pressure exerted by federal regulations and state policies to evaulate program quality on the basis of placement rates of students in occupations directly related to their training. Since handicapped students are less likely to find employment immediately after training, vocational staff are reluctant to accept

handicapped students and thereby jeopardize the status of their programs.

Special educators also limit the number of handicapped students placed in regular programs. Often they are cautious not to exacerbate the tension which may exist between them and vocational education staff by, first, limiting recommendations to those students who are most likely to succeed and, second, attempting to place these students in programs and classes which are taught by vocational teachers known to be sensitive to the special needs of handicapped students. Indeed, many of the efforts and strategies used by special educators to support handicapped students in vocational education are directed toward either encouraging principals to provide services for handicapped students in their schools or modifying the attitudes and behaviors of vocational education teachers toward handicapped students. As a result, they frequently soften their advocacy for mainstreaming.

Parents's attitudes and perceptions may also affect the placement of handicapped students. Many parents interviewed in the Nellum study seem to prefer the sheltered environments of the separate vocational programs to the risk of their children failing or being ridiculed in the regular school programs.

Two organizational factors also limit handicapped students' access to regular vocational programs. One factor is the extent to which the demand for a program (or all vocational programs) exceeds the places available in the program. Demand may exceed supply because the district resources are limited or because program size is geared to labor market projections of demand for new workers in that occupation. When demand exceeds supply, priority is given to advantaged students; handicapped

students are accepted only when space permits. Another organizational factor limiting some handicapped student's access to regular vocational programs is their need for special support services, including remedial reading and math instruction. Typically, regular vocational education programs are offered in blocks of two to three hours, especially when programs are offered at separate skills centers or regional schools. Since the support services are available only at the home schools, the potential for conflict in the scheduling is always a limiting factor.

Architectural factors, although less important than attitudinal and organizational factors, also limit access to regular prograsm for the physically disabled students. This is particularly true in large urban centers where the vocational schools were built well before access for physically handicapped individuals was a legal and social issue. As a result, the vocational options for physically handicapped in many cities are limited to programs offered in the more modern structures that can accomodate their physical needs. Moreover, in communities which offer vocational services in regional vocational schools, programs or skills centers, the need for special transportation for physically handicapped individuals is also a limiting factor.

An additional disincentive to mainstreaming, not mentioned by Nellum, is the excess cost policy contained in the federal regulations for the VEA. The regulations limit the use of the set-asides to 50% of the excess costs of providing vocational education to handicapped students in regular programs but allow the set-asides to be used to pay for 50 percent of the full costs of separate programs. While there is no direct evidence that school administrators have initiated separate programs -- or prevented handicapped students from entering regular ones -- primarily to obtain

the additional reimbursement, the promise of a higher level of reimbursement would certainly appear to be an enticement away from mainstreaming.

In considering this array of barriers to mainstreaming, it is apparent that federal legislation can affect them in only limited ways. The VEA already mandates that students with special needs should be served in regular vocational education programs whenever possible. The only way this policy could be appreciably strengthened is by moving the condition "whenever possible" to make the policy of mainstreaming absolute. But, as argued in the previous section, this change would be educationally irresponsible. Other minor changes can and should be made. The disincentive inherent in defining excess costs differently for separate and regular programs should be removed. The current policy should be altered, for example, by supporting separating programs only for the costs above the per-pupil costs in the district of providing vocational education to non-handicapped students. (The same change should also apply to reimbursement for disadvantaged programs.) The law, and the administrative practices which implement it, should also be revised to remove the conflicts between serving handicapped students and 1) evaluating programs primarily on the basis of placement rates and 2) limiting course enrollment on the basis of labor market demand projections. In one sense, these conflicts are difficult to resolve for they stem from the multiple purposes of the VEA: developing vocational education programs attuned to meeting labor market needs versus giving priority to special needs students who may not always meet the highest labor market standards. Unless Congress decides to give one purpose priority over the other, the disincentives to mainstreaming

caused by these conflicts may be best removed creating a separate category for handicapped -- and other special needs -- students when evaluating the success of a program in terms of placement rates and when limiting course enrollment on the basis of labor market projections. Clearly this solution is flawed in that it assumes that handicapped students cannot compete on an equal basis with non-handicapped students. But until fears about serving handicapped students are diminished, it seems better to err on the side of giving them special considerations which they may in fact not require than to bar them from desirable vocational programs.

Federal legislation can also diminish the architectural barriers to mainstreaming through continued application of the current provisions of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

But other barriers to the participation of handicapped students in regular vocational education cannot be removed through direct federal intervention: the federal government cannot legislate attitudes or dictate details of school operation such as the scheduling of programs. To address these issues, we must rely on technical assistance to educate people about the capabilities of handicapped individuals and to provide them with constructive strategies for meeting the needs of these individuals.

With barriers to mainstreaming present in many local agencies, the most common and predictable way of providing vocational services to handicapped secondary students is in separate, self-contained classrooms. Within this broad category, the special programs vary, first, on the basis of whether they are provided in the regular comprehensive high school or in a separate facility and, second, in the extent to which they provide students with entry level job skills.

When the separate classrooms are found in the regular high school, the majority of students tend to be minimally mentally handicapped or educable mentally retarded. However, learning disabled and emotionally impaired and, in some cases adacemically disadvantaged, students are some times included. These programs generally provide academic as well as some vocational training.

One key factor in determining the quality of the programs and the types of vocational options available is the presence of certified vocational instructors. Where skill courses are taught by certified vocational educators, there appear to be serious efforts to provide students with salable entry level skills and to place these students in community positions related to their area of training. The emphasis on entry level skills is also influenced by the extent to which the program is viewed by the principal and staff as an integral part of the school.

Where the programs are staffed by non-vocational teachers, the emphasis is placed not on the acquisition of specific occupational skills but on the development of appropriate general work habits. Preparation for employment consists solely of work experience and on-the-job training in low-skill, low pay, low turnover occupations such as fast food servers, gas station attendants and custodial helpers. While some attempts may be made to find permanent placements for more able and responsible studetns upon completion of the program, placement is not a central activity.

Separate programs in separate facilities are generally organized for severely handicapped students, primarily the multiple handicapped. In

most cases, the vocational programs for these students are non-skills, world of work programs. Students are prepared for employment through placement in on-campus training stations with varying levels of responsibilities. As students progress, the more able are placed in off-campus positions typically in low-skill, low-paying jobs. Again, the quality of programs varies.

Placement in regular classrooms is a far less frequently used strategy for serving handicapped students in vocational education. Within this strategy, these are differences in the range and quality of the program options available. As with separate classes, the type of school in which the students receive their instruction is an important determinant in this variation. In the case of regular classes, the key distinction is between comprehensive high schools and separate facilities for providing vocational education, such as vocational high schools or regional vocational schools. The difference is important because the vocational schools tend to have a wider range of course offerings. They also tend to be more technically and skills oriented than vocational programs in comprehensive high schools and therefore better prepare students with entry level job skills.

Generally, the handicapped students who participate in vocational school programs are those who need the least educational support: the physically handicapped and the sensory impaired. Physically handicapped students, as long as they can meet the academic and vocational standards, can be accomodated if transportation and physical access issues can be resolved. Sensory handicapped students, such as the hard of hearing,

can be accomodated by providing trained interpreters.

Other handicapped students are usually placed in regular programs in comprehensive schools. This occurs for several reasons. First, vocational schools tend to be more demanding and require students to meet academic and behavioral criteria. Second, staff at the centers are more business oriented and thus tend to be less tolerant of atypical behavior especially if it is potentially disruptive. Third, support services when available, are provided only in the comprehensive high schools. For scheduling reasons, then, it is thought to be expedient to schedule handicapped students' vocational courses in those same schools. Providing vocational and support services in the same building also makes the students' resource teachers and other academic teachers more accessible to the vocational education teachers if problems should arise. In fact, however, not all comprehensive high schools offer support services. Their presence depends on the willingness of the principal to support them. When support services are not available, handicapped students are expected to function in regular programs without the benefit of special services. Their only alternative is placement in separate, self contained special education programs.

Another strategy used to serve handicapped students in vocational education in a number of secondary schools is a transitional, or adaptive, program which combines the approaches of separate classes and mainstreaming. Typically, special education students who have been in separate classes for their academic education are given their first vocational course with that same, separate group. The rationale for this approach is that the students need to be moved gradually to regular programs; if they are

suddenly plunged into a course with regular students after having been in classes with only other special education students, it is argued, they will stand little chance of success. The first vocational course is usually exploratory. Students who find an area in which they are interested and competent are then moved to a regular class on a trial basis. If they succeed, they remain in the class. If they do not, they move back to the transitional class to look for another area in which they might succeed. Students who do not progress to a regular program are trained in marketable skills in the separate class.

An additional, frequently used strategy to supplement or substitute for vocational education for handicapped students is work experience. Among vocational educators, it is agreed that the best form of work experience is a cooperative program. This program is coordinated with students' vocational education and is designed to provide on-the-job training in areas of employment related to their course of study. The opportunities for handicapped students benefitting from cooperative programs, however, are at best limited. Since cooperative programs are limited to regular vocational education students, most handicapped students are not even eligible for them. Even when they are eligible, handicapped students stand little chance of being selected because priority for access is given to the most able students in those programs. Handicapped students are much more likely to participate in work study programs which are designed to orient students to the general world of work. In most LEAs, work experience is obtained by placing a specified number of handicapped students in CETA-funded, in-school positions.

Two factors determine the quality of the work experience programs: first, designation of a specific job counselor or developer for handicapped students and second, the adoption of skills training as an option for handicapped students.

It is clear, then, that the strategies used to serve handicapped students, in regular vocational education programs as well as in separate programs and work experience programs, vary in the range of vocational options they provide and the extent to which those options provide entry level job-skills. In many cases, the options for handicapped students are limited by factors over which the federal government has little or no direct control. As we have seen, vocational offerings may be limited, for example, by the resources available to the school. Unless the federal government is willing to provide districts with considerable additional funding (as it has done for certain purposes in the past), it cannot substantially alter the fact that an area has no regional vocational school or that the overall demand for vocational programs exceeds the number of places available.

Thus, the most constructive federal role in expanding options for handicapped students is not legislative, but as in other areas, administrative: OVAE should work with the state vocational education agencies to provide technical assistance to local school districts to assist them to develop effective strategies for serving handicapped students within the structural and resource constraints of each district. Districts might be encouraged, for example, to assign certified vocational instructors to teach handicapped students in separate classes or they might be

aided in developing a schedule which would enable resource teachers to spend part of their day or week in vocational schools instead of limiting their time to the comprehensive high schools.

Within this range of options for handicapped students in vocational education, the Nellum study identifies a relatively limited set of strategies for using the VEA handicapped set-asides to support or extend these options. An important objective in using the set-aside is often to provide seed money to encourage principals to offer vocational programs for handicapped students. The special educators who control the handicapped set-aside in many districts feel that this is a crucial first step in developing options for handicapped students because most directors of special education have no formal authority over the instructional programs at the high schools. Support of the building principal who does have authority is therefore crucial.

The major use of the set-aside in Nellum's 15 sample sites is the purchase of equipment and materials for separate vocational programs for the handicapped. In the two sites which rely on work experience as the primary strategy for serving handicapped students, set-aside funds are used to pay for part of the salaries of work coordinators.

Less frequently, set-aside funds are used to support other activities. In a few instances, for example, the set-aside supports the establishment of vocational evaluation centers, usually in mobile vans which travel among schools. The purpose of these centers is to increase the representation of handicapped students in regular programs by providing valid and objective assessments of the students' vocational interests and abilities through standardized testing and analysis of sample work behaviors. The expected

outcome of the assessment is a rational, individualized vocational plan to be included in the IEP. In providing this plan, special educators hope to alleviate fears often expressed by vocational educators that their programs would become dumping groups for problem students by showing them that the handicapped students can perform adequately.

Surprisingly, set-aside funds are used only infrequently to provide supplementary services to handicapped students in regular programs. In the Nellum sample, only one site used funds in this way -- specifically for interpreters for hard-of-hearing students placed in the regular vocational programs at a skills center. One reason cited for the lack of use of this strategy is state constraints on the use of funds. Another reason is reluctance on the part of school vocational administrators to use VEA funds for support services since they felt that such services are already available and adequately funded through state and federal special education programs.

Also, VEA funds are not used for in-service training despite indications that vocational education teachers lack the critical skills needed to work successfully with handicapped students. And VEA funds are rarely used for curriculum revisions: in very few cases are vocational education teachers asked or provided with resources from any source to make significant shifts in their role behaviors or expectations about the curriculum for handicapped students. In many cases, vocational educators argue, curriculum modifications are not made because a major state criterion for program assessment is the number of students placed in jobs related to their training: curriculum modifications, as they see it, would weaken their ability to meet this goal.

These patterns of use of the VEA set-asides suggest that secondary school districts should be encouraged and assisted to use these funds in a wider variety of ways. One means of accomplishing this is to provide technical assistance. Another is to ease the administration of these funds by eliminating the excess cost requirements. As described in the earlier section on State Behavior and Implementation, a number of vocational administrators argue that the set aside funds are used conservatively because school districts fear that their claims for reimbursement will be disallowed as a result of inadequate documentation of excess costs. Also, states which set limits on the use of set aside funds could be required to remove their limits so that districts can have maximum flexibility to use the set asides to best meet their needs.

Even with such changes, however, we must recognize that the set-aside allocations to individual districts are small. In the Nellum sample, for example, handicapped allocations range from $2500 in a small rural district to $76,000 in a large district with a number of schools to be served. In most cases, then, the VEA funds available can barely support one strategy in a year let alone several, so that the range of strategies within any single district may always be limited. Still, technical assistance can aid local districts in making more creative and effective use of even limited funds.

At the post-secondary level, many community colleges attempt to mainstream enrolled handicapped students whenever possible while providing the support services necessary to succeed. The most common structures for providing support services are a handicapped or exceptional student office or a diagnostic intake center which serves all students. Far less

frequently -- in two of Nellum's 15 sites, for example -- community colleges develop separate vocational training programs or skills centers to meet the occupational and employment needs of handicapped students, especially the educable mentally retarded and the physically handicapped. A third strategy seen in some community colleges is to place responsibility for obtaining necessary assistance for handicapped students on the regular college counselors. In these instances, the counselors solicit help from other faculty and staff on a case-by-case basis.

Consistent with these strategies and in contrast with the use of VEA funds at the secondary level, the set-aside funds for handicapped post-secondary students are used primarily to provide support type services. Special counseling, guidance and individualized program planning activities are the services most often cited by administrators in the Nellum sample. Since many of these services are available to all students, VEA funds are used to purchase the services of a staff member to focus primarily on the needs of the handicapped students enrolled in occupational programs. VEA funds are also used in some larger community colleges which have established an exceptional student center to supplement the center's activities for the benefit of handicapped vocational students.

Thus, it appears that community colleges are more successful than secondary schools in serving handicapped students individually by providing support services which enable them to participate in regular classes, and that they use their VEA funds to support this

service strategy. One partial explanation of the difference between secondary and post-secondary institutions is that community colleges have greater institutional flexibility than high schools and vocational schools. Because they must continually work to maintain or expand their student body, they emphasize the need to be responsive to a wide range of community needs including providing assistance to special needs populations. A second, more important, explanation lies in the differences in the student bodies: Secondary institutions are compelled by law to provide a free public education to all handicapped students. Community colleges are under no similar mandate and therefore enroll handicapped students in relatively small numbers and with typically less severe handicaps than secondary schools. And within this restricted population, community colleges tend to serve only those students who identify themselves as handicapped or whose disability is visible.

These observations have two implications for assisting handicapped students in vocational education. First, service delivery strategies cannot automatically be generalized from the post-secondary to secondary levels: high schools can be encouraged to establish resource and disagnostic centers for handicapped students, if they do not already have them, but we cannot expect that these services will fully address the needs of all handicapped students in the school. Second, post-secondary institutions should be encouraged to undertake a more systematic identification of all handicapped students and to extend their outreach efforts to handicapped students.

2. Disadvantaged

The major finding about strategies for serving disadvantaged students is that the majority of attention goes to the academically disadvantaged: economically disadvantaged students receive very little attention, especially in terms of spending the VEA set-aside.

Academically disadvantaged

The three strategies usually used by school administrators to serve academically disadvantaged students are:

- remediation, apart from participation in vocational instruction;
- a combination of remediation and vocational education instruction in regular programs; and
- separate vocational instruction and work experience.

Remediation in basic skills areas is the primary strategy used because services for academically disadvantaged students are usually controlled by central district administrators not vocational educators. Generally these remedial classes are not linked to vocational programs and participation in them, in fact, frequently precludes participation in vocational education. The acquisition of basic skills in almost all school districts has priority over partication in vocational education. This is particularly true in districts which have adopted state or local minimum competency rqeuirements for high school graduation. In such instances, vocational education is considered an elective option. If students want to graduate with a regular diploma, they must enroll in remedial academic classes designed to prepare them for the competency exam, and such enrollment does not leave time for vocational education. In other cases, successful completion of

competency exams is a formal prerequisite for enrollment in regular vocational education classes. Remedial classes may also cause scheduling conflicts: even when students are not prohibited from taking vocational education by heavy course loads or entrance requirements, remedial classes may meet at the same time as the vocational classes they seek to take.

The strategy of assisting academically disadvantaged students through a combined program of remediation and regular vocational instruction is rarely used: seldom is basic skills instruction geared to specific needs in a vocational program or conversely is vocational education used as the means of remediating deficiencies in basic skills. One example of this approach, which is widely used in some areas, however, is the Individualized Manpower Training System (IMTS). The IMTS is an individualized, automated system and in most cases, related to vocational training. While it is used for students who are generally lacking in basic skills, it is also used by vocational instructors to refer students who experience difficulty with academic concepts related to a particular vocation.

The third strategy --serving academically disadvantaged students in separate vocational education programs -- is usually reserved for severely disadvantaged students whose academic performance is several years below grade level and who have behavior problems and for an overlapping group, potential dropouts who will not remain in school in a regular program. Almost all of these programs combine vocational skill development, some type of work experience and, to a limited extent, academic skill development. The Work Experience and Career Exploration Program (WECEP), offered, for example, in Wisconsin and Illinois is a highly structured program of work experience and related classes for fourteen and fifteen year old

potential dropouts. The program is not itself aimed at providing vocational training for entry level job skills but seeks to keep students in school so that they can later enroll in vocational education courses.

Thus, the major issue in providing assistance to academically disadvantaged students is not the predominance of separate classes, as it is with handicapped students, but the gap between remediation in basic skills and the provision of vocational education. The use of separate programs for the academically disadvantaged is less frequent than for the handicapped and seems appropriate for severely disadvantaged students and potential drop outs; separate programs which group academically disadvantaged students with handicapped students and racial and linguistic minorities are not appropriate, as is discussed elsewhere.

The lack of coordination between remedial and vocational programs for the academically disadvantaged can be addressed initially by adding a policy statement to the compensatory education laws, similar to the VEA policy on mainstreaming. The policy would simply state that remediation provided to academically disadvantaged students should be provided whenever possible in conjunction with their program of vocational education and that every effort should be made to avoid scheduling and course requirement conflicts between compensatory programs and vocational education. As we have seen with mainstreaming, however, such a policy statement alone will not be an adequate impetus for major changes in the system. It must be supported by technical assistance to local school districts to provide them with strategies for achieving better coordination in areas such as improved scheduling

and joint program design.

The use of the disadvantaged set-aside to support activities for academically disadvantaged students varies in large measure with the method used to distribute funds among schools within districts. In those districts with a number of high schools and in which funds are allocated for all schools providing vocational education, the funds available to each school tend to be limited. They are most often used, therefore, to hire an aide a part-time teacher to provide tutoring or remedial instruction. In those districts, where the funds are targeted to a few schools or projects, they are more often used to support innovative or pilot vocational programs for academically disadvantaged students. As with the handicapped set-aside, local districts should be encouraged and assisted to use these funds creatively to meet their needs in serving disadvantaged students.

At the community college level, the emphasis in serving academically disadvantaged students is on individualized instruction. Either students are placed in remedial classes before beginning their regular college coursework, or if they experience difficulty in their regular vocational classes, they are most frequently referred to a resource center. The resource center provides assistance through programmed instruction (either testbook or computer-based), tutors or small group instruction. In large urban areas, the programs for the academically disadvantaged are enormous.

VEA set-aside funds are generally used to support pilot programs for academically disadvantaged students or to increase the size and scope of the on going remedial and support services programs.

Economically disadvantaged

Far less attention is given to economically disadvantaged than academically disadvantaged students in vocational education at the secondary level. Typically, services provided to economically disadvantaged students are not focused on their educational development. Instead these students are assisted with health or nutrition programs, or more frequently work-study programs. The work-study programs, often funded by CETA, vary in quality. Some pay careful attention to the quality of the career/vocational component to insure that the work experience is meaningful and that students receive some formal guidance activities. Other programs do not formally address the educational aspect of the work experience program but leave many work-related issues to be addressed in informal ways. School administrators in the Nellum study feel that these programs are critical motivators for low income students at their schools. Most admitted, however, that the number of slots available in these programs is seldom sufficient to meet the demand.

There are no special programs, either academic or vocational, that address low income students solely. Participation in vocational programs is based not on financial status but on student interest and ability to meet the entrance requirements. The special classes which are developed are targeted to students needing educational assistance: the academically disadvantaged and the handicapped. To the extent that economically disadvantaged are served in these special classes, it is because they are assessed -- or assumed -- to have these other special needs as well.

Consistent with this pattern of services, secondary school districts rarely use VEA set-asides to fund specific programs or projects which focus on the economically disadvantaged. Of the 15 sites in five states visited by the Nellum study, only the school districts in Florida use set-aside funds for work study programs for the economically disadvantaged. Even in these districts the number of work study slots receiving support is quite limited.

At the post secondary level, the basic strategy for serving economically disadvantaged students is to provide financial assistance. This assistance takes many forms and is provided according to individual needs. Vocational education funds are tapped to support work study programs. The major problem facing financial aid officers in both rural and urban areas is funding sufficient financial aid to support the increasing number of students who are seeking higher education and who are in need of financial aid.

Community colleges also often play a major role in service delivery to the economically disadvantaged through CETA. In many areas, the local CETA prime sponsor contracts with the community college and technical institute to provide services ranging from needs assessment to skill training. In some cases CETA pays the tutition costs for its clients to enroll in regular vocational education programs. In other cases, it develops its own separate programs and contracts for college facilities and staff.

Hence at both the secondary and post-secondary levels, the objective of the services provided to economically disadvantaged students is to ease their financial hardships, not to provide special assistance in vocational education. This finding supports the argument made in the previous section

that economic disadvantagement is not by itself an appropriate criterion for student eligibility for special educational services. Congress, therefore, should consider restricting the definition of disadvantaged individuals to the academically disadvantaged and give priority to economically disadvantagement by targeting funding to economically depressed areas or schools.

3. Limited-English Proficient

At the secondary level, there are few vocational education strategies to meet the needs of LEP students. Bilingual and ESL programs are typically aimed at the elementary and middle grades with the assumption that LEP students are proficient in English by the time they reach high school. In the Nellum sample, virtually none of the school districts have developed a bilingual or ESL vocational education strategy, or have established supplementary support programs for LEP students enrolled in regular vocational education. Since students entering high school are no longer considered LEP, they are, therefore, expected to compete for vocational options available to all students. At the same time that no special considerations are made for linguistic capabilities, however, former LEP students often are categorized as academically disadvantaged because of poor performance on academic achievement tests. In small or rural communities where the number of non-English spekaing students is small, LEP students, like all special needs popualtions, are assisted by individual teachers on a personal basis.

While the informal approach is undoubtedly appropriate in small districts, the lack of attention to LEP students in larger districts

should be changed. The fact that these students appear in disadvantaged classes suggest that their need for assistance has not been eliminated in elementary school as administrators claim. Again, this in an area addressed better by administrative guidelines and technical assistance rather than by legislative mandate.

The effect of the VEA on services to LEP students is more visible at the post-secondary level. The overwhelming desire to serve the community coupled with the ability to plan and orchestrate both internal and external resources have led to the successful acceptance and implementation of programs and activities for special needs populations generally and LEP students in particular in community colleges. The most consistent pattern of service delivery at the community college level to all LEP students, including those in occupational programs, is ESL instruction. In addition to structured ESL courses, students experiencing language difficulties in both academic and vocational courses are often referred to the library, media center or guidance office for individual assistance. Despite this attention, within the Nellum sample, only the community colleges in California were able to identify special services for LEP students funded with VEA disadvantaged set-aside funds. These are vocational ESL activities in contrast with the academic ESL activities discussed earlier. The efforts are new and modest but include a wide range of activities such as:

- linking the ESL curriculum to language skills critical in occupational programs;
- using bilingual aides for individual and small group instruction

to LEP students in occupational programs;

- translating, modifying and developing curriculum materials for LEP students in occupational programs; and
- using bilingual shop instructors to provide occupational training to LEP students.

These approaches sound useful and appropriate -- and would be helpful at secondary as well as post-secondary levels -- but each requires substantial resources. They would seem to be appropriate, therefore, only in agencies with large enough populations of LEP students -- who speak the same language -- to warrant a considerable investment of resources.

Planning and Reporting Activities

Another strategy for supporting services to special needs populations is to plan for those services within a comprehensive framework of an assessment of student needs, the developmnet of program strategies for meeting those needs and the identification of the resources required to support the strategies. The presence of local planning for special needs populations signals that the local agency is giving attention to those populations and consideration to what services should be provided. The result of such planning hopefully is services that are effective in meeting the needs of the students.

Requirements for planning together with requirements to report on that planning can also serve as a mechanism through which the federal government can influence service delivery to special needs populations. Reports on local plans for service delivery provide a basis for federal

administrators -- or state administrators acting as their agents -- to determine whether local practices are consistent with federal law and intent. These reports are appropriate in assessing how a district is both complying with a specific policy, such as the definition of handicapped students, and addressing areas without detailed policy requirements, such as the specific strategies to be used to meet the needs of academically disadvantaged students.

As a mechanism for federal intervention, reports on local plans are similar to the strategy of technical assistance emphasized throughout the paper. Both are process rather than content strategies and as such neither directly dictates local action as funding and policy requirements do. But both are especially valuable in situations where a detailed federal policy specifying, for example, a particular program format to be used by all school districts, is not appropriate. The most effective role for the federal government in this case is to set broad policies and then aid local districts to develop strategies to conform with those policies but tailored to the needs, structure and resources of that district. Technical assistance and planning requirements are consistent with that role.

Despite the potential value of comprehensive planning, many local agencies appear to do little planning for special needs populations. In some instances, there is planning for a target population but it does not include planning for participation in vocational education. The Nellum study finds, for example, that there is virtually no vocational education program planning for limited-English proficient at the secondary level or for economically disadvantaged students at either the secondary

or post-secondary level (which is not surprising given that there are generally no special vocational education services for these groups). In other instances, some planning is done but it tends to be organized around funding sources rather than target populations, and moreover does not always involve vocational educators even when planning vocational education strategies. Generally, planning for handicapped students in vocational education is done by special educators, not vocational educators even when it involves planning the expenditures of the set-asides. The advantage to this approach, however, is that the special educators also control state and federal special education funds, and often coordinate the use of these funds with VEA funds. There is no similar coordination for the other special needs populations. Plans for providing assistance to academically disadvantaged students in vocational education are also typically made by staff other than vocational educators; vocational educational staff are usually responsible only for planning separate vocational programs for these students. In this case, however, having central office staff do the planning does not even result in the coordinated use of all resources for academically disadvantaged students; functions are assigned by funding sources and the staff typically do not work together.

Given the weakness of many planning efforts for special populations, Congress should consider adding requirements to the VEA to focus greater attention on planning. This could be done either by strengthening the current requirements for local applications or by adding new requirements for local plans.

The VEA currently requires applications from all local agencies seeking VEA funds. These applications are to include, among other things, 1) an assessment of local needs and a description of how the proposed programs will meet those needs and 2) a description of how vocational education programs will be coordinated with resources supported by other funds. Thus, basic components of local plans are already included in existing requirements. The applications would have to be changed in two ways, however, to be useful in encouraging local planning for special needs populations. First, the law or regulations should require that the applications specifically address special needs populations. Since the current requirements cover all programs for which a district is seeking VEA assistance, special needs programs should be included but the requirement would be stronger if special populations are mentioned specifically. Second, and perhaps more difficult, the applications must become more substantive. An analysis of the applications in the 15 sample states in the Abt study reveals that they currently tend to be weak and compliance oriented: rather than containing descriptions of programs, activities and coordination efforts, they contain statements of assurance of compliance with regulations. Changing the content of the applications will depend on the state agencies taking an aggressive role since it is to the state agency that the applications are submitted.

An alternative to reshaping the local application is to add a new requirement for a local plan for vocational education. Special populations could either be treated in one section of a comprehensive plan for all vocational programs, as is required now in some states, or in a plan solely devoted to these groups. In the plan, local agencies

would describe:

- their assessment of needs for service;
- strategies for meeting needs;
- use of VEA funds to meet needs; and
- coordination with other resources.

The weakness of relying on either a revised application or a local plan to encourage planning efforts is that, like all required documents, they run the risk of being produced for compliance purposes only: they may not serve as an impetus for real planning but instead be viewed as a burden which is not worth the small amount of VEA funding obtained. To minimize this risk, the requirements for the documents should be simple and programmatically oriented: the emphasis should be on descriptions of activities and processes rather than the presentation of detailed statistics; information which is already submitted in another document should not be required. Also to minimize the risk that the applications or plans will simply be compliance documents, the state vocational education agencies, to whom the documents are submitted, should be required to review and comment on the documents not just approve them. The state agency should also use the documents as the basis for providing technical assistance.

In requiring local agencies to submit plans or applications, Congress should require the participation of vocational educators in their preparation but not otherwise specify process requirements such as a mandated planning group with specified membership and meeting requirements. Such requirements are overly restrictive and have not been demonstrated to be effective as the state level.

Policy Implications

As the length of this section alone suggests, local activities for special needs populations are diverse. To summarize these activities at the broadest level, however, it appears that limited-English speaking students at the secondary level and economically disadvantaged students at both the secondary and post-secondary level receive very few special services in vocational education. The major characteristic of services to handicapped students in vocational education at the secondary level is that they are governed by procedures mandated under the Education for the Handicapped Act, as amended by PL 94-142, and are controlled by special educators rather than vocational educators. Also, of all the special needs popualtions, secondary handicapped students are most frequently served in separate programs of vocational education. For academically disadvantaged students at the secondary level, the central issue appears to be the separation and potential conflict between vocational education and remedial services in basic skills. At the post-secondary level, patterns of service delivery are similar across special needs groups except the economically disadvantaged: students are typically identified through self-referral or by a counselor, referred to a special services office and provided with individual assistance.

Overall, the impact of the Vocational Education Act, as we said at the beginning of the section, is limited: only a small portion of the activities or practices for special needs populations can be attributed to the VEA. Usually other state and federal laws, and to a greater extent, the local context in which the VEA is implemented play a much

larger role.

In reviewing the local activities for special needs populations in this section, several recommendations have been made for changing the VEA or its regulations in response to perceived problems in delivering services. These recommendations include:

- amending the Education for the Handicapped Act to specify the involvement of vocational educators;
- revising the definition of disadvantaged by: 1) eliminating economic disadvantaged as a criterion of individual eligibility for service and 2) narrowing the definition of academic disadvantage, possibly by adopting a definition already in use in another federal law such as Title I of ESEA;
- clarifying the law and regulations governing program evaluation on the basis of student placement rates in order to establish a separate standard for special needs students in regular vocational programs;
- amending the compensatory education laws to encourage coordination with vocational education in planning and service delivery for academically disadvantaged students;
- amending the regulations for local applications or adding requirements for local plans to encourage planning for special needs populations.

The most notable feature of these recommendations is that they represent marginal adjustments to the law as currently written and therefore cannot be expected to alter significantly the limited impact which VEA has. Moreover, they reflect the fact that many aspects

of service delivery to special needs populations are not appropriately dictated by detailed federal legislation for two reasons. First, many service delivery issues are too complex and too dependent on the particular setting in which they arise to be resolved by a government policy which assumes a single model of service delivery across all settings. For federal law to specify, for example, that no academically disadvantaged students should be prevented from enrolling in regular vocational education programs by their participation in remedial courses in basic skills would be inappropriate because the conflict between vocational education and basic skills may in some situations be unavoidable. Second, many of the factors which determine the strategies used to serve special populations are determined by the structure of and resources available to the district in which the students are being served, and therefore are not under direct federal control. For example, the placement of handicapped students is determined in large measure by the vocational program options available in the school district. To the extent that these options are limited by the absence of a regionla vocational center, they cannot easily be altered in response to federal legislation.

Thus, on many points of service delivery for special needs populations, the best strategy for improving services is not through changes in or additions to the law or regulations but through technical assistance, as recommended throughout this section.

CONCLUSIONS

In passing Title II of the 1976 Education Amendments, Congress intended to improve the access of special needs populations to opportunities in vocational education. It therefore included provisions for special needs populations directed both at the state vocational education agencies through which the federal law is administered and at the local agencies which are responsible for the actual delivery of vocational education.

In analyzing the implementation of these provisions, it is evident that the Vocational Education Act in itself has had a limited impact on meeting the goal of ready access to educational opportunities for special needs individuals. The limited impact appears to result not from a failure to comply which can be remedied simply through increased prescription in the law or increased enforcement efforts or even from problems in the way the special populations provisions are drafted. Instead the limited impact appears to result from three sets of factors:

- the structure of the VEA with its multiple goals and its administration by the state vocational education agencies;
- the state and local context in which the law is implemented with its own goals, priorities and level of resources; and
- the nature of the problem of serving special needs populations in terms of finding appropriate strategies, overcoming the reluctance of vocational educators, and relating to other laws and programs dealing with special needs populations.

These factors indicate that the revisions in the law suggested throughout this paper will result in only marginal changes in the impact of the VEA and, consequently, in improving the access of special needs populations to vocational education: since the suggested revisions do not change the structure of the law or the setting in which it is implemented, they cannot

be expected to have a major effect. If Congress is not satisfied with having a limited impact, it can consider two more dramatic changes in the structure of the VEA.

1. Congress can recast the VEA to focus entirely on special needs individuals. This option for revising the VEA has been discussed for several years. The premise behind the proposal is that the proper role of federal funding in any area, not just vocational education, is to support projects to which state and local government do not traditionally devote adequate attention and resources. Groups within the population which need special assistance are preferred candidates for such federal attention. This strategy has two advantages over the law as it is currently structured. First, it would concentrate funds, and larger funding might have a greater impact in serving populations with special needs. (A related issue is whether Congress would still define the federal role as a catalyst and require a dollar for dollar match on excess costs. If it did, local agencies might have more funds going to special populations than they know what to do with -- or are willing to commit.) Second, this strategy would focus attention. At the state level, the burden of administering the federal law would be reduced and narrowed to a few issues. (State agencies presumably would continue to serve broader functions in administering state laws and in providing monitoring and technical assistance in occupational disciplines.) At the local level, VEA funds and regulations would have a clearer identity and therefore have greater impact in serving special needs populations than they do now.

This option would probably be opposed by many vocational educators who have come to rely on VEA funds -- limited though they are -- to support their regular programs of vocational education and who do not see services to special needs populations as the main thrust of their efforts. If

Congress took a firm stand on narrowing the focus of the VEA and on earmarking federal dollars to support projects which state and local administrators were unable or unwilling to support themselves, vocational educators would probably support a shift in emphasis to new programs rather than to students with special needs. While any single purpose law would not be popular, an emphasis on new programs is at least consistent with the goal of preparing students for the labor force.

2. Congress can eliminate the special needs provisions from the law. Under this option Congress might retain a broad mandate to serve special needs individuals, much like that contained in the 1963 Vocational Education Act. But it would not target funds to these groups, or include reporting, evaluation or policy requirements to govern service delivery. The argument supporting this option is that the costs of administering the set asides and other special populations provisions outweigh the benefits of these policies: the money provided to local agencies is too small to support any significant program efforts, and attention to special populations draws attention away from other vocational education purposes. Services to special populations should be left to the other federal programs which already focus on these groups -- programs such as special education, vocational rehabilitation, Title I of ESEA and CETA. With the exception of Title I, these programs already provide the major impetus for providing support to special needs students in vocational education and employment training programs. The argument against this option is that the efforts of these programs are often duplicated because they do not work well with vocational educators. The provisions for coordination currently in the laws are not particularly effective.